

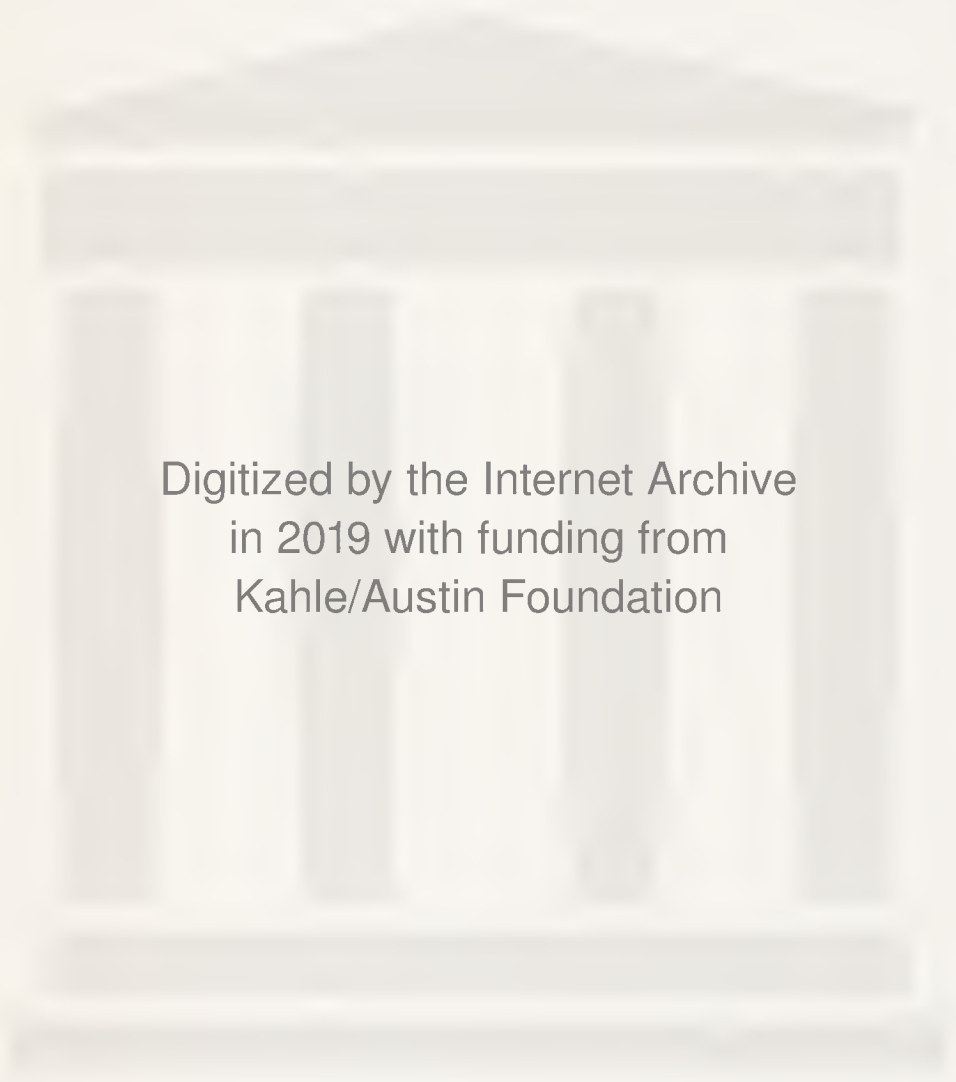


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# HENRY JAMES:

Letters to A. C. Benson and

Auguste Monod; now first

published, and edited

with an introduction by

E. F. BENSON



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## INTRODUCTION

THESE letters of Henry James to my brother, Arthur Christopher Benson, are extracted from a correspondence that extended over twenty years. Some of them (and those among the most interesting) have been omitted because they have already appeared in Mr Percy Lubbock's admirable edition of his letters; others because they deal with mere trivialities.

The residue, here for the first time published by permission of the writer's nephew and namesake, exhibit in his own inimitable manner the two ruling devotions of one of the most lovable of men. We find in them first of all the quality of his affection to his friends. No one valued and needed friendship more than he, and few can have had a larger company of those with whom he established and maintained a special relation. Long intervals often elapsed during which he neither saw nor wrote to them, but, when once the relationship was established, the silver cord was never loosed, and he took hold on it again in all its brightness, and demanded to know all that had happened to the absent and how and when and why. He loved to be cherished in similar fashion and to be held in remembrance, speaking of himself as "singularly accessible to demonstrations of regard" and thanking heaven that "for him remembrance was a great romance". Nothing clouded the clear shining of these relationships: he could be and invariably was

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critical of his friends, but he wholly rejoiced in their successes and achievements, humorously picturing himself as "gilded by their effulgence" as he watched their enviable progresses.

Coexistent with this devotion and as luminous was his devotion to his art. It would be idle to attempt to determine the relative brightnesses of these, for Henry James gave all the powers of his intellect and his emotion to both. His friends and his art were equally his religion, and to both his loyalty was unswerving and his service. The combination is unusual, for generally a man, who is as absorbed as he was in his work, tends to let human ties take care of themselves, while the man who values friendship so highly is usually a dilettante, or, at any rate, puts his work, emotionally, in the second place. It was not so with him: his art was always decked like an altar, ready for perpetual sacrifice. This religion was no affair of sentiment and lip-service: his goddess was an austere mistress. "Art should be as hard as nails" was his phrase: even lyrical poetry should consist of "stony-hearted triumphs of objective form". Of the work of others as well as of his own he was "corrosively critical", he was "ferociously literary": it was impious to set up in that shrine anything that was not hammered and beaten. Facile composition was anathema to him, he demanded always "a greater hardness, more bronze to the knuckle". "Hew out a style", he wrote to me once, "it is by style we are saved".

This white fervour for style, this unmitigated horror of any slackness or softness was, as I have said,

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a religion. Round about the date of these earlier letters which follow he had experienced a sort of literary conversion. "All my previous work", he once said to my mother, "has been subaqueous: now I have got my head above water". This enlightenment pervaded his whole system like some penetrating ray; his letters, his conversation were imbued with it, and so it became not his second nature but his first. Those who had the privilege of hearing him talk recognize when they read his letters his authentic living voice, even as those who are soaked in the style of his later books salute in them the handling and habit of his letters. All three are one and they are all he: and all, after this conversion, are his natural mode of expression. He had hewed out this new style, and it took possession of him in spoken word, in letter-writing and in his books.

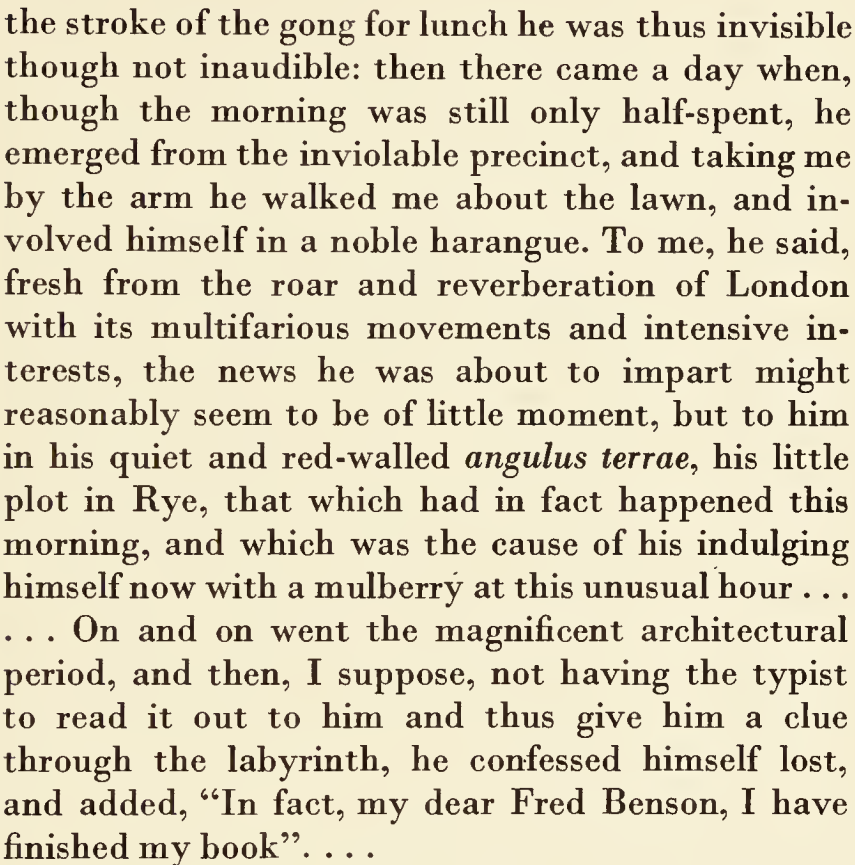
It was not that he talked like a book, or wrote letters like a book, but his talk and his letters alike are like books of his own in the making. This richness of utterance, with its wealth of allusion and metaphor, has the freshness of improvisation. With care and with a continued soaking of the mind in his books I can conceive it possible to turn out a page of print that might be mistaken for authentic "James". Not so with the letters and the talk: their spontaneity is inimitable, and no one but he ever scribbled or talked like that. But behind all three is the common inspiration, and what a style that was that now flowed from his tongue in casual speech, and in dictation of his books to his typist and in letters to his friends! When he talked one watched entranced the

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gradual building up of an architectural structure. He paused, he corrected a phrase, he amplified, he defined, and one heard all that his typist heard as he paced up and down the garden-room of Lamb House while he arrived at the precise, the "beautifully creaking" packing of his words, until the charged sentence would hold no more. One saw the packing in progress, the exquisite bestowal of this hint or of that, and just as the sketch for a picture by a master-artist may be more suggestive than the finished piece, so, to my mind, this rich allusive talk contained a freshness that vanished when the full flower, intricate and involved, blossomed between the covers of his book.

The letters seem to represent the intermediate stage between his talk and the printed page. The pen between his fingers conduced to the latter, the fact that he was talking to his friend gave them spontaneity, and thus they partake of the double charm, and it is this latter that moves one with a sense of his presence.

Vivid indeed is that presence to me now as, turning over these letters to the brother who used to share this house with me, I sit on this June morning outside the garden-room, where thirty years ago I sat on just such a day of June and heard his voice from within dictating to his typist the novel on which he was engaged. It boomed out through the open window between the tassels of the wistaria, now louder, now softer, as he paced up and down the length of the room, and the metallic click of the typewriter made response. From breakfast until



So living and so authentic is his voice in that inward ear of memory, as I read these letters, that it almost seems to come not from the pages at all but from the open window of the garden-room close by. . . . Has he returned to the little house which he so loved, has he even been here all the time, needing only from me some strong reminder of his presence to enable him to manifest himself again? Will he come out, visible as well as audible, tangible even, and take my arm, strolling about the lawn and telling me of his finished book?

F. F. BENSON

## LAMB HOUSE

## RYE



*PART I*  
THE BENSON LETTERS







34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*  
*September 3rd, 1892*

DEAR MR BENSON,

You must, on the contrary, let me explicitly thank you for your yellow sheaf<sup>1</sup> and tell you that I much appreciate (as well as the charming verses themselves,) the friendly impulse of remembrance which led you to send it to me. I have not delayed so long as may seem to acknowledge it, for it lay here for many weeks, and I found it but the other day, on my return from three months abroad. I had directed "books" not to be forwarded to me, and it had fallen into that category. I have read your verses with a great deal of pleasure—I find a charm in your "muse". She is young, and yet she is serious, and she has emotion—a kind of emotion I like—a delicacy and sincerity. I am not sure that you "go in" for form as much as I like to see it gone in for, but you have some, you have many, happy accidents, and a distinction of spirit which it is good to meet. You are happy to have the lyric impulse so naturally—it is a sad thing never to have it at all—and even sadder to have it only by halves. Be as melancholy as you like—but try and be as perfect an artifex, for there is always glee in that and it is the best resistance to fate. I hope you are having the right sort of holiday, and am

Yours most truly,

HENRY JAMES

<sup>1</sup>*Le Cahier Jaune*, privately printed poems by A. C. Benson.

15 Beaumont Street, Oxford  
September 8th, 1894

MY DEAR ARTHUR BENSON,

Your charming letter should have had a more speedy answer had it not found me in the very agony of an occupation which for the day sternly compelled me to abjure and neglect all correspondence. Yours is the very first I respond to on returning to the surface of the earth (I don't pretend to have been above it—rather far below,) and to the communion of men. The Alpine air was in the folds of your paper and the smell of the woods—and even, I fear, a little, that of the Germans. What I most inhaled, however, was the pleasure of seeing you impelled, though, possibly, by desperation, to write to me. I should have taken it ill if you *hadn't* “presumed” on the imagination that I have known you long. Such imaginations are distinctly to be encouraged—for we can surely make it as long in the future as it may have failed to be in the past. I hope you came back with girded loins—I could have wished for you that your foreign plunge had been longer. What a jolly provision of fate that our insular existence here gives us that inestimable resource—that talk and guerdon and solution—of the “foreign”! It is a thing that makes one think this almost a convenient world. And I don't speak as one comparing,



34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*

*February 24th, 1895*

MY DEAR ARTHUR BENSON,

If you again inflict upon me the horrible title of "Mr" (how ugly are the possibilities of the tongue of Milton and of Gray,) I shall take immediate action in the matter—even to the extent of coming down to Eton (like a fidgetty mother,) to see about it; or even to that of assaulting *you* with "Arthur" *tout court*: and how will you like *that*, eh? Rather than be a "mister" to you I would, to speak plain, be a mystery. You see to what you reduce me. You tell me I'm remarkably like a bishop and I try to keep up that impression. I have hung tenderly over your uncommonly handsome page<sup>1</sup>—luxurious bard! Beautiful, delicate, eminently worthy to have been carried out, the idea, I think, of your fine composition and full of felicities, and of the penetrative touch, the form. There are passages and lines on which I heartily congratulate you and on which our late friend (I speak of dear dead Gray) must even now, from inconceivable empyreans, be dropping a thrilled little smile. Who am I indeed that I should talk of immortal verse? If I had any right to do so I should perhaps mention to you that there is here and there a collocation, a slight deviation, over

<sup>1</sup>*Thomas Gray*, a privately printed poem, by A. C. B.

All thanks for the rarefied volume. I smile at myself as the Pontiff of Paddington, or the Pope of the Platform. If my friendly emotion stumbled into "impressiveness" it was perhaps as fortunate a refuge for that lively sentiment compromised by incomplete utterance as another. Remembrance for me, is, thank heaven, a great romance; and I have already the most gently-gilded image of my evening and morning at the wide, fair Addington and our journey up to town—even to the cab of the windows that struck us dumb. Your green quarto has, in spite, or indeed by reason of, its elegant leanness an air of refined prosperity. May this be no vain symbol of your situation. I remain in England this coming spring and you must show me that you are not in studied error as to the whereabouts of yours,

Very faithfully,

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34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*

*February 26th, 1895*

DEAR ARTHUR BENSON,

You *can't* be, with my name, "too prehensile" unless you take it in vain. So I'm H.J. (for I like *both* the small signs,)—unless you haven't time—and then I'm anything you like. I had hardly done, this morning, thinking remarkably well of your letter, influenza and all, when the beautiful little brown book<sup>1</sup> came in, of which I think even better. I am singularly accessible to demonstrations of regard, and welcomed the book almost as much as if you had written it on purpose for me. I have been reading it indeed in that spirit, as much as possible, this evening and taking a very personal pleasure in it. Your verses move me to kindness—they seem to me to have great charm and great sincerity, great moral and emotional distinction, with the motive of each lyric always—or almost always!—a real lyrical motive, a vibration of the chord, a play of the faculty. You seem to me to abound in ideas for verse—I mean to be one for whom the poetic occasion is always waiting, and is always individual and genuine. You quite charm me in short by the delicacy and seriousness of your inspiration; and if I didn't know you your

<sup>1</sup>*Lyrics*, by A. C. B. (John Lane).





34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*

May 14, [1895]

DEAR ARTHUR BENSON,

You are nobly liberal. Your letter overflows with hospitality. Would *Thursday 30th* be at all a possible day for you? I name the last one of the month (since you say your Thursdays are your best days,) because the interval, in this accursed London squash, seems such a fever of conflicting claims, with French and American botherers all plying me at once (repeat not my heated words,) I reach out to a calmer hour. Thursday 30th *will* be calmer, I think. But if it doesn't suit you, name peremptorily some other occasion. If it does, I shall be delighted. I have an idea you have Whitsuntide holidays and things just after that. Forgive my crass ignorance if you haven't? I am touched by the gentleness of your friendship—and above all by that demonstration of it that you allude to in the matter of the dedication. Right gleefully I accept it. I am impatient to rest my eyes on it. Excuse my brevity—forgive my baldness. Only, give me a sign of some day or other save (29th) at the *end* of the month. Friday, May 31st?

Yours always,

HENRY JAMES



34 De Vere Gardens, W.

Monday. [May 20, 1895]

MY DEAR ARTHUR B.,

I take my courage in both hands and throw myself on your charity and generosity. You will instantly guess that my remark has some odious reference to the 30th and you will curse me before you read further, as well as after. My busy morning has just been interrupted by a visit from poor old Lady Millais, who had come to tell me that Sir J.E., R.A., who is, in the evening of life, a victim of melancholia and of other maladies, had, for the first time for ages—he has been very ill for a year—just expressed to her the wish to have a few old friends to dinner and had kindly named me among the men he would like to see; so, on their choosing, for reasons, the 30th, she had come round in person to put her hand on me—to plead with me to come at any cost. They are very old friends, who have always been kind to me, and Millais is such a pathetic old dilapidated lion that I was much touched by this little incident. But I told her I was on that day engaged to dine with you and that, alas, I therefore couldn't come. At this she manifested such depression and disappointment that I was troubled and agitated, and I ended—*vous me voyez venir*—by telling her that I would write to you and ask you if it would be anything less than odiously inconvenient to you to let me

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come on another day. There is my petition in all its naked hideousness. Don't hate me for it, my dear B., because I shouldn't be able to bear that—it would break me down altogether; and have patience with a man on whom the complications of life have laid conflicting burdens and difficulties. I shouldn't dream of asking you this favour at shorter notice or in an ordinary case. But this little overture of the Millais', in their appealing twilight, *isn't* ordinary and there are reasons (more than I should trouble you with,) that give it a force for me. I shall probably never dine there again. Forgive so many words. I have told my little story. The devil is in it to this extent, that I can offer you no other day till after the 30th. I have a vague idea of Whitsun week coming then and of your having holidays and absences. But all the first days of June (save the 1st or 3rd) are up to the 15th, or even later, free to me, and on any one of them that you are so magnanimous as to name I will come and assure you of the unbounded compunction and affectionate gratitude of yours evermore,

HENRY JAMES

34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*

*May 23rd, 1895*

MY DEAR ARTHUR B.,

You have behaved with singular charm; and I leap at *Thursday 6th* as the first possible occasion to express to you more fully my sense of this. I haven't the least illusion about my having inconvenienced you; but only judge of what my motives must have been to have driven me to do it.

Don't answer this, nor dream of it: I have overtroubled you already. I send you to-day a book of small stories—but I beseech you, most sincerely, not to answer that either. Stick it on your bookshelves and *n'en parlons plus*. Thanks indeed for the little story of the Eton-boy and the Daudet book: it will charm the sensitive Alphonse. I wish he might have done Eton properly—but (though I take them all, woe's the day,—7 persons!—to Oxford on Saturday) he is unable to do anything properly. He is not like your Papa and Mamma; whose visit, moreover, is the only thing, I think, I ever envied the Queen. Don't be presented—be like me: be a Rock. Let the Queen be dying to have you—and not have the time. Your “9 maids” sound like the Grand Turk—save for their maidenhood! Will they all wait on me?

*A bientôt.*

Impatiently yours,

HENRY JAMES

34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*

*June 10th, (1895)*

MY DEAR ARTHUR B.,

I like your letters much, but I like your dinner almost as much. You give, in such a case, with your so liberal welcome, in your so romantic home, much more than you can receive. What is the use moreover of "being friends" except in the belief that giving and taking are all one, that exact accounts are a loathsome pedantry and that indistinguishable obligations are the law of the affair? My too abbreviated dash at you was pure satisfaction and excellent poetry. I was all the better the next morning—you wholly routed the gout-fiend. I'm glad I've *seen* you—what I call seeing: I hadn't done so till then. Well, it's very fine—but I *should*, I repeat, have liked to show you. Don't be afraid—I *will*! *Then* you'll not write in a day or two in a spirit of sublimity; but perhaps in "natural irritation". *Basta*. Your rhetorical question opens up deeps. *Cette jeunesse!*—over what gulfs it swallow-plunges. Just for to-day let me say that I think I find myself at a point where the difference between sadness and cheer, interest and detachment, lies behind in the road like a shuffled coil. It's all one, it's all life, it's all fate, it's all—everything! And yet after all there is perhaps something more grossly

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primitive, and less "painfully acquired" in the sentiment with which I ask you to consider your hand as grasped by

Yours evermore,

HENRY JAMES

*Osborne Hotel,*  
*Torquay, August 5th, 1895*

DEAR ARTHUR BENSON,

I have read them bang off<sup>1</sup> and you must put up with a little politeness. All your verses touch me no less than their predecessors. They seem to me to have truth and charm and distinction and a particular something which I can perhaps best call loveability. I am hideously, corrosively critical and am always wanting things to be what they are not—i.e., (or e.g.,) when they have the lyric egotism and confidentiality I want them to be hard and detached and impersonal—stony-hearted triumphs of objective form. When they are real masterpieces of *that* (which so often happens!) I want them to be quivering and throbbing and human, lyrical cries and emotional realities. So I have no business to speak of anything. None the less there are things I *would* speak of if you were here—so much more easily would it be to talk them, in many tones, than it is to write them in none. Why aren't you here to take a good Devonshire walk with me? I hang over a green garden and a blue sea from a big balcony where I smoke solitary cigarettes. There would be room on the balcony even for your inches or cigarettes, even for Apollo's lips. I fled down hither immediately

<sup>1</sup>*The Professor, and other Poems*, by A. C. B.

after that almost violently supererogatory social occasion at H. Sturgis's—where it was a wonder that anything so simple could be so almost painfully complicated. I have had a much-needed bath of silence and solitude—of bland air and unmassacred work. Unfortunately I have, from the 15th, to spend ten days in town. *Is* there a chance of seeing you there for an hour? No—you are starting for the Jungfrau or some other pure eminence. I envy you the scented pines of Switzerland. I shall probably return *here* for September, etc. To-morrow I shall read the Professor again. He's a little too ghostly a professor—but he's massive compared with *her*. She is of a pearly paleness. But together they make a very interesting eloquent A. C. B. Hang it who *should* turn on his bed of pain if not the restless poet? Rise, however, *surge tandem*, from that couch of green curtains and snowy sheets. I wish the Jungfrau were in S. Devon. Yes, indeed, what a block burden of a postman's pack you must carry! Let me not add to it by the weight of a single stamp—and only accommodate your shoulders in silence to the friendliest pressure of the very illegible hand of

Yours always,

HENRY JAMES



34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*

*August 27th, 1895*

MY DEAR ARTHUR B.,

I have just written to Gosse, but I should be sorry to put you off with the mere overflow of that not particularly brimming cup. On the other hand I am sad, I am empty, I am weary, (don't take these pen scratches too literally,) and don't see exactly with what strong spices I can savour your special bowl. I'm afraid you must e'en put up with the mere stale spice of friendship. It wouldn't be fair, moreover, to pursue with importunate appeals, for you've gone where you've gone to simplify your consciousness (though indeed in sophisticated company,) and you must be weary of the hum of men and the humbug of women. I hope you're living, in your high Alpine meadows, a fine full bovine life—or at most only alternating the ox with the chamois. I am a mere smoky London sheep browsing in Kensington Gardens. I ruminate, in this capacity, your gentle letter of the other day and it ministers to my sense of—what shall I say?—of summer and beneficent nature. I seem to see you happy in spite of the arrogant priesthood<sup>1</sup>, and a certain acute *Heimweh* for old Swiss years—old memories of August afternoons on mountain slopes—gives a passing twist to

<sup>1</sup>An allusion to a preposterous cleric staying at this hotel.



my vitals and makes me sorry that I can't stretch myself somewhere beside you and sniff up the vague, warm scents and listen to the desultory tinkles. For I fear my memories are rather more of lounging at my length than of leaping from peak to peak. Then we would talk of the question you brush with so benevolent a pen—the dear little deadly question of how to do it. I rejoice that I have been striking you, anywhere, as ever having done it—I seem to myself to have so rarely hit the bull's eye. I am having no adventure, and save that I go away twice, I believe, these next few days, for 48 hours, I am in town till Sept. 5th. It is now rather wet, rather windy and rather hateful, but it has been just as hateful when it was rather dry and rather stifling. So there isn't much to be got out of that. I have 2 irrepressible French friends (the Paul Bourgets,) who have been here for 2 days and have now *départed* for Torquay—coming from Inverness and travelling, eventually, to Japan—!!—but nothing more agitating has happened to me—unless it be to have spent 3 days at Folkestone in the very bosom and under the very nose of the ubiquitous Abraham. All Jewry was there and I understand the rage of the persecutors—“*Damned noser hereditas*” Du Maurier told me Burnand had called it. I hope, my dear A. B., that all goes better and better with you. Can you resist dipping over into Italy? I can't; I dip even as I write the words. Forgive my plain unvarnished letter. I wrote to Gosse an hour ago—but I have already told you that. I am really getting quite too unvarnished. May this catch you before you flit. I

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would beg you to knock at my door as you pass through town—but I'm afraid I shall not be behind it. *Vale*. I will do better another time. Give me the chance and believe me unreservedly yours,

HENRY JAMES

*Osborne Hotel,*  
*Torquay, September 14th, 1895*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I am infinitely moved by your beautiful letter, though it leaves my curiosity unassuaged. I see you suspended over the void<sup>1</sup>—but I don't either know how you got there nor how you were restored to the security which you almost abuse in saying to me things fairly ironic in their amiability. But I won't torment you; I'll possess my soul in patience; and only hold you very fast in all the hereafter. I thought I did before; but at any rate it shall be faster now. *Vous voilà averti*. You say most interesting, thrilling things—and you will have had, it would seem, a magnificent privilege. Don't I gather that you tasted of the bitterness of death—and gulped it down with a smile? It is evident that you behaved beautifully at the hideous repast—with manners worthy of a London—or even a Windsor dinner party. Well, you are reserved for finer occasions still, and it won't be my fault if you don't have them. I shall hold you to your promise about the diary—I hunger for the admirable page. Meanwhile you think too kindly of *Roderick H[udson]*; and I am very glad you do. It isn't very, very good—and it might have been. However it is what it is—

<sup>1</sup>A. C. B. had fallen into a crevasse and was with difficulty rescued.

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and let me not blaspheme against the ingenuity of my youth. Very faint and far and feeble it seems. But one's youth was in itself a merit—it worked *for* one. I hope your coming Term opens its arms to you. Please feel that I slap you rudely and repeatedly on the back and am yours with distinct emotion,

HENRY JAMES

Osborne Hotel,  
Torquay, September 24th, 1895

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

The other day—5 or 6 ago—Edmund Gosse, in town, where I had occasion to spend a few hours, told me what it was that had happened to you on the glacier. Ever since then I have wanted just to tell you that now at last I *know* it; but the desire to spare you a letter has continually carried the day. Now it is—that desire—only superficially vanquished: the letter that I still spare you is the smallest rejoinder to this. I *particularly* request of you to make none: *entendez-vous bien*? All the more that absolutely the only thing I want to remark to you is that I *do*, and with a still more relentless grip, hold you faster than ever. Gosse's story didn't do for me at all: I pay the penalty of my magnificent imagination. Will it in future, or ever, be anything of a motive to you to happen to think of that? But you will answer this question only *viva voce*. And you will utterly forget, please, in the meanwhile, yours constantly but contingently,

HENRY JAMES

34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*

*November 25th, 1895*

TRÈS CHER AMI AND CONFRÈRE.

My silence since I received your beautiful book<sup>1</sup> gives you every warrant to consider me a cold and clammy monster, or, rather, *would* do so were you not capable of generous and exquisite reflections. I feel I have only to touch that cord in you to make it vivid. That, in the first place, I was brutally preoccupied and distracted, and then, in the second, was bent on dealing with you with a free and fond mind, in exactly the right corner of the sofa and under the right evening lamp. In these conditions I have at last had my time with you as I wanted to have it—had it most happily and intimately; perhaps I may almost say too much so. I mean by that, my dear Arthur, that I can't in the least *criticise* your book, nor give myself up to the process of judgment about it. I read it affectionately, even romantically—liking it almost as much when I *didn't* like it best as when I did! I liked you for writing it—and I liked it for being yours. There was nothing in it to check or chill this emotion: if you had only put something of that sort in I might succeed in being more rational with you and more capable of a sense of perspective. However, let me

<sup>1</sup>*Essays*—dedicated to H.J.

be as lucid as I can. Roughly speaking, I like the papers on the ancient men better than those on the recent folk. All these—More, Marvell, Bourne, Gray, etc.—have, to my mind, a beautiful, an admirable quality: they are distinguished pages—perspective and artistic and charming, full of literature—full of light. I think that in some of the others your hand is less firm, your sensibility has less of an edge. Here and there throughout there are questions of form as to which I should be tempted most benevolently to contend with you—I mean small matters of style and surface. In general, too, I feel a certain desire to screw you up just a peg higher—I mean in the line of something that I don't know what to call but intensity, something to make you squeeze your subject a little tighter—press on it with a little harder thumb. *Voilà*. Those are the worst buffets I have for you—the rest are the kindest, most repeated pats. It's the book of a gentleman, and a highly, beautifully cultivated chap. You know a great deal and you feel a great deal. It's the book, also, thank heaven, of a *young* man; both for better and worse. Your next will have a wrinkle or two, figuratively at least, that doesn't furrow *this* candid brow nor depreciate the bloom of your beauty. Let me talk—more articulately—of the next. It's hideous that we're both so busy—so engulfed. Perhaps the Xmas-tide will bring you an hour or two that you can give me. In the meantime give me what you can spare in another and more indestructible essence. You must be full of great affairs—I delight in knowing it. Life's nothing—unless heroic and sacrificial. There

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are things of art—of perfection we'll talk about. Meanwhile to have lived with you awhile in quiet absorption and appreciation has been a very personal joy—and will remain so always—to yours very constantly,

HENRY JAMES



34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*

*December 17th, 1895*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I have thought it an act of common humanity to leave you alone these last overloaded weeks, and I am sure you think only, of me, for it, a little less ill than you otherwise might. The result of it is that, however, you have been unthanked for your last letter and that I have, thereby, on my consciousness, a proportionate quantity of unexpressed and yet definitely dedicated emotion. You see I only dedicate you sentiments—barely words: whereas you dedicate me fine things I can show and talk about and even bind in Russian leather—as soon as my New Year's bills are paid. I am a little vague about the hour of your freedom, if freedom it be—having only a thin idea that it sounds on one of these next days. But I mention it—apart from the joy I wish you in it—to say, importunately, this: that you must really, on some evening of the imminent season, come and dine with me and sleep—as spending the night may perhaps diminish rather than increase the inconvenience of coming at all. You *must* come at all, you know—otherwise we might as well renounce all fraternity and indeed all equality (for you have loaded me with accepted benefits,)—and go in for mere licentious liberty at

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once. I can easily put you up—and not at all uncomfortably, as it were—and the pleasure of a chance to talk a bit would be such as to make me regret more than ever my lack of the lyric gift. I am here, and I am, thank heaven, unusually free (save on the 2 or 3 obvious nights—I include New Year's Eve,) from engagements. Do come—and let me know, at your entire convenience, an evening. We will talk of Addington then. Please express, meanwhile, when you have a chance, my great personal sympathy with it. I am brief on purpose, to make you think I may have something in reserve to say to you. I *have*—everything. Besides it isn't fair to be your last straw. Answer me only when you won't hate me.

Yours even if you *do*,

HENRY JAMES

34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*

*January 1st, 1896*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

This is verily brave news. Come on Saturday p.m. next, 4th, and stay till Monday. That is the only human, the only ungrudging way to do it. If you are for the Saturday-Monday in town you must have a roof over your head—and so why not mine as well as another? I am forgetting—it comes over me—the massive rafters of Lambeth; but aren't you afraid to sleep *there* alone? *I* should be! I can at any rate put you up without the least inconvenience, and should (I need scarcely dot that i) rejoice to do so. Do whatever is most *absolutely* convenient to you and most congruous with anything else you may have on foot; only come on Saturday at 8—to no one but me (*rather!* and the domestic and the dog,) and kindly let me know by a mere sole syllable that I may expect you. If you should consent to abide, your whole Sunday would be free as air.

Yours very constantly,

HENRY JAMES

34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*  
*Thursday (Jan. 16, 1896)*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I am divided between 2 sensations—panting for to-morrow p.m. and blushing for all the hours of all the past days. I ought to have acknowledged your beautiful letter (after your last being here,) about—about everything. But I have been so taken up with living in the future and in the idea of answering you with impassioned lips. This however is (besides saying, so feebly, *that*, to be able to face you at all) to say, more forcibly, that you are not to worry in the faintest degree about the question of my conveyance to-morrow, meeting me, causing me to be met, or getting me over at all. I can with utter ease procure myself to be transported. I shall *come*—“that is all you know—and all you need to know.” *Voilà*. I shall in the meantime weave spells over your house and its inmates.

Yours almost uncontrollably,

HENRY JAMES

34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*

*April 5th, 1896*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

You're the most generous of men, and the great affection I bear you is invariably confirmed by what, on every occasion, you do and say. It is now of an indestructible tenderness. There! I am greatly touched by your so magnanimously writing to me after my own long silence and when you have scarce taken breath from all your daily burdens and bothers. It makes me, however, feel that *you* feel that my silences, my speeches, my everything—as directed to you, are all built up round an exquisite considerateness. I think of you with inward thoughts—and the sense of your valour is an inward luxury. It helps me doubtless to be, as you say, “serene”; though I am afraid I am not quite the creature of abysmal calm that you appear to glance at. However, let me not blaspheme against the jealous gods—before whom I make it a law to wriggle constantly on my stomach. I have been doing my little task in my little conditions, and my most delirious dream doesn't (in more than 1 or 2 particulars) soar above that. I like selfish lonely work so much that you figure to me as a hero with your complicated contacts. They will have some large and deep fruition—about the time that I'm descending to the tomb. We are in truth both victims of our devouring age,

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and if I can pick your bones before the last scrap of you—and of me—is gobbled up, I suppose I shall be entitled to say that I have known friendship and intimacy in what they have of most intense and abandoned. *Pazienza*—there must be some quiet backwater stagnating for us (forgive the ungraceful image) somewhere ahead. I've got you on the shelf in other words—the little high-up, dusky shelf, safe and obscure, of last resources as (what is it I mean?) supreme appeals. I'll respect you till I'm dying—then I'll grab at you. But what is this fantasticality about my *not*, my dear Arthur, having enjoyed my last delightful little visit to Addington? It's a ribald jest, I presume: peace, otherwise, or you'll discourage me. How could I not enjoy the bland beauty of the whole thing, and the noble courtesy and kindness, in particular, of your parents? I carried away the same fine old mellow picture as before; and the one snake in the grass that I remember was that I got almost no talk with you. And yet you were a fraction of what I went for. On the other hand I was there but for the fewest of hours, most of which I spent in slumber. So goodbye to the bar and its moaning. I rejoice in news of your gallant brother Fred, my illustrious colleague, or rather *confrère*. Please assure him of my watchful interest when you have a chance.

Drink deep, my dear Arthur, of the sense of holiday. I'm afraid you have 30,000 letters to write. Is to see you for  $\frac{1}{2}$  an hour unattainable? There would be a rare charm in it, but nothing would induce me to "invite" you. I have no right to ask you (I even

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show no delicacy in it,) such a question. I leave town on May 1st for 6 months—I have taken a grubby hovel near Rye, Sussex. *There* I hope to put in some not wholly infamous toil. Farewell, noble ghost. Consign to no deadlier limbo than you can help, the pale phantom of our intercourse. There is no life, but I am if not for time at least for eternity

Yours,

HENRY JAMES



*Point Hill, Playden,  
Rye, Sussex, May 2nd [1896]*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I have waited to get into still water to thank you for your last salutation. I had this prospect from day to day, and yesterday it was carried out. I came down to this sleepy little corner of Sussex, where I have taken a small cottage, for May, June and July. Such is my still water. For a week before I left Town the tide ran high and wild—I had no minute of which the dignity of its duration could let me feel that it was worthy of you. There was none with which I could mix you up. Was that one worthy of you which saw you sit for the photograph you very kindly sent me? I won't say so with a thump of my hand on the table. But it is at least a promise of better things. It's wonderfully better than the others I've seen of you and I possess it at least with a good conscience if not with mad rapture. To have it from you is indeed a great pleasure. The people who do you don't know how—I should like to show them. At all events to see you so seems good compared to seeing you never: which is what I relate it to. You are, I suppose, engulfed again—your admirable mother told me so night before last, when, in a 4-wheeler, I went to obsequiate her, as the Italians say, wedged with 3 Gosses—*dont une*, as the French say, Tessa. What a phrase—everything



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but as the English say. It is charmingly quiet and quaint here, and I hope to put in some work. My little hill-top bungalow has a view—but naught else. Pray for me—care for me—don't forget me, and don't, under pain of everlasting fire, answer me. Let us lay up treasure for some time or other. Good-bye, my dear Arthur—be of good and uplifted heart. Have you no photograph of me? I had a dim fancy I had given you one. It shall be yours as soon as I get home again.

Yours always,

HENRY JAMES

*Point Hill, Playden,  
Rye, Sussex, June 29th, 1896*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

A charming letter from you produces even in your most disciplined correspondent a vibration not to be assuaged by a remark (even in sanguinary red) about your not particularly caring for an answer. In our chronic invisibility, let us at least be audible—if not sensible. Therefore I thus overflow into the illegible and tell you that to hear of you, in your habit as you live, peoples, for the day, animates and most agreeably, as it were, odorizes, my successful little solitude (I will tell you presently why I call it successful). It's almost a pleasure even to see you outraged by the sordid . . .—I mean regarded merely as a part of the evocation—a realistic touch or vivid feature. What a vile little business that, however—and how the very highest faculty for going through life as a gentleman may still be trusted not to leave one unacquainted with the suggestive beauties of other ways of playing the game. Phenomena of that class sicken and deject me—getting the better of cads, even, isn't particularly inspiring. But I rejoice the "Eton" is to be honourably and integrally presented: presented to *me* individually. I even go so far as crudely and avidly to express the hope it may be. Don't for the

friendship you (may) bear me; open my wanton little volume—a bundle of very dry sticks—until some day when you are hard beset to kindle the fire of fancy. I mean leave it alone—take it abroad—read it, if at all, in a train or a *salon de lecture*. That's the drawback of sending such tokens as one's books are: one means it as a mere affectionate gesture, a remembering nod—and it has, yet, a vile appearance of imposing a time-consuming act. The thing, in a word, is just a pat on your back. I tremble almost to say how I like not being in the madding crowd in these months—how I like, in other words, rustivating and ignoring just as I do—niggling away at my little trade and just platonically wishing that some of my friends were with me. (The platonic, in some cases, I admit, become highly acute.) *Anch'io son' pittore*—I too have a bicycle. I've taken to it but very recently—but it seems to give me a glimpse of the courts of heaven. (*Absit omen.*) What a pity we can't pedal into them together! But I observe you lay stress on the fact that you bike *alone*. So be it—you are safe: I shall have to be much more brilliant than I am yet before I strain in your un-deviating wake. This little old-world corner of Sussex is lovely and sympathetic—with rather too much of the billowy—and the way one gets *at* it is really a joy. But I needn't preach at the converted. What you tell me of Gosse makes me sombre. He is the sport of fate. Well that's one way of living—treating life as not *all* solitude and syntax—that has much to be said for it. But I have the imagination of disaster—and see life indeed as ferocious and sinister.

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I expect him here for the 11th-13th, and shall give him what cheer I can. I repeat that I too *son' pittore*—I too have red ink.

[NO ANSWER IS PERMITTED.]

Farewell, fine ornament of a mighty order. I shall look out for you in the courts of heaven—you will know me by a battered Humber.<sup>1</sup>

Forever yours,

HENRY JAMES

<sup>1</sup>Bicycle lately acquired.

*The Vicarage, Rye, Sussex,*  
*September 2nd, 1896*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I have hesitated on the brink, again and again—but this time I take the (not, I admit, heroic) plunge. Is it the wildest of dreams to wonder in the dimmest of ways whether, by a matchless miracle, you would be free and disposed to come down here for any Sunday before I go away? Let me immediately tell you the worst. I had, from May to August, a charming little cottage here—but I've had to give it up, and I've now only a frumpy, shabby, practically gardenless parsonage. BUT, I could put you up not uncomfortably and the little place has a small old-world charm. I should furthermore delight to behold—to enfold you—especially if you were to bring your bicycle in your train. I could take you in that case a charming ride. I'm here through this month; but the 28th, I admit, would probably, as my last day of all, be an impracticable one. At all events I make you this sign of remembrance and regard. It is really in a manner, for the sign's sake; for it's on my conscience to go on to say that my suggestion doesn't really represent anything good enough to make the shadow of an effort or a sacrifice for. I am far from everything but London—and 2 hours and  $\frac{3}{4}$ 's from there. And of course you're not there. You are in Scotland or in Ireland or in Nor-

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mandy. You're too far away to come—that settles it. Wherever you are I hope you have rest and joy. I don't in the least know when Eton recommences—I am assuming October. Let this take you the assurance of my peculiar constancy. A charming note to-day from E. G. on lake of Orta in bedazzled presence of the revelation of Italy. Happy—unhappy—man!

Yours, my dear Arthur, right loyally,

HENRY JAMES

*The Vicarage, Rye,  
September 5th, 1896*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

'Tis well. Not as well as it might be; but still so far from ill that I can only applaud you—partly to show off my amiability. I enter as far as my discretion permits—and that, I confess, is a good way—into the beautiful reasons which, for this time, make Addington sacred to you. If I were the Parents of Addington I wouldn't give you an inch, not I; and if I were the son of those Parents I wouldn't—under any solicitation—take one. *My* solicitation steals away on tiptoe—really almost huffy. It's delightful to hear that you have been yourself in that monstrous mood. You put it almost obscurely—but I can see that you have marched from triumph to triumph. Keep it up—at the beautiful Addington, to the very last moment of the fine interlude. I can *see* you there, happily;—that is not obscure. I renew my salutations very earnestly and am yours again and again

HENRY JAMES

P.S. *Silentium!*



34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*

*December 23rd, 1896*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I have had from you a very graceful Xmas gift—and have none but this mere response to give you on my side. The sign of your remembrance at a time when your burden is, as I know, almost overwhelming—this tangible token has a price. I have read the thin book at a sitting—and I wish it were thicker. It hasn't as much of you in it as I desire; but what it has is a very interesting, vibrating—though I am not sure I shall say absolutely *finishing*—you. I love your *line*—but I sometimes fidget a little over your page. But I daresay that is simply because, as a perpetual proser, I am jealous of the brush of the wing of verse and try to dignify the petty sentiment with the name of criticism. And in addition to being jealous I am also envious—envious of the lyric mood, the lyric *leak*. You can say the egotistical thing—I never! And it is a long pain and privation.—But why do *I* talk to you of privation?—when I am in the very act of thinking how intensely you must be now face to face with your own.<sup>1</sup> You must feel, this Xmas, as if the side of the house—the front of the house, of your life had been blown off and you were all open to the elements. I don't know where you are—or where to be—but I pray

<sup>1</sup>The death of Archbishop Benson.



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my sympathy may reach you. You are buried beneath your occupations, I do know, and I hope there is a warmth in that. Also that your Mother is by this time far away—in a climate and in kind company. I think of the great fires at Addington and the ghostly slopes in the winter dusk. What good things you have to remember! Don't let *me* drop out of them—if I *am* a good thing—and believe me

Yours always,

HENRY JAMES

34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*

18th February, 1897

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I was prepared to inflict a visit, I was prepared even to inflict a message; but I had no intention of inflicting a letter. If I had not already had too vivid a mind-picture of your heroic hours and magnificent mixture of everything, dear Mrs Cornish's wonderful, wandering touches would have called it into being. I talked with her about you with almost an approach to continuity, and that was as near to you as I felt I had any right, in such conditions, to come. Your own picture has strokes, indeed, even beyond Mrs Cornish. I don't wonder you didn't feel you could fit in to any corner of the carnival at Queen's Acre; for myself, I confess, I spent most of my time—or that part of it at least that I was not walking off with Julian [Sturgis]—in feeling that your presence there would have been still another source of that distraction which it is simplest to speak of as delightful. So I go on admiring you at a distance and still more conscious of the scale on which you are constructed when, out of your abyss, you can toss up such a flower of friendship to

Yours evermore,

HENRY JAMES

34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*

15th September, 1897

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

What occasion I am giving you to vent upon me your so characteristic stores of resentment!—by first, I mean, failing most odiously to acknowledge on the spot the charm I found in hearing from you; and by, second, aggravating that outrage with the injury of my Remingtonese. The sad fact is (only it isn't a sad fact at all, but quite a glad one, and I pretend to sorrow only for the vain show of it)—the gross reality, at any rate, is that since we last corresponded I have been reduced to Remingtonese altogether. It's a question of that or eternal silence, and I shall believe until you definitely notify me of the contrary that, on the whole, you prefer the click of my dictation to the idea of the importunity of a still more complete reserve. I was on the point of breaking into an instantaneous squeeze of the hand you make such a brave long arm to hold out to me, when I was hurried out of town and into the extreme of social servitude. I had but that moment come back from a long absence: these things endlessly recommence. I promised myself to write to you last week—but last week is a dwindled point. The flush of my pleasure at the sound of your voice has not, however, in the least faded with the days. Sweet Alice Leigh—I owe her more than I ever thought I



decessors—containing, all, such a fund of feeling and thought, so much vibration, generally, of life, that it cast on me, for the moment, almost a spell. You must some day tell me of the man.<sup>1</sup> But when will that day come?—I mean for *any* easy converse. I respect your perpetual pressure and never pull your sleeve. Some day or other I shall perhaps have my reward, but it will doubtless not be in this world. Meanwhile, at any rate, be as often as possible reminded by others of yours, my dear Arthur, always,

HENRY JAMES

P.S. If your mother is still with you I beg you to assure her of my friendliest remembrance and interest.

<sup>1</sup>*Letters and Journals of W. Cory.*

34 *De Vere Gardens, W.*

1st October, 1897

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I return you with this—or rather separately—the charming Diary; which you will think perhaps I have kept too many days. But I have only been waiting, amid much occupation, for the right hour to give it the right sentiment. That is what—this last—I *have* finally given it. It has been, for me, a very friendly, happy, delightful contact; almost a tangible substitute for never, never seeing you. Give me more in time; give me a great deal more, give me as much as you can. I like it enough for that. With my voracity for personal introspections, I find in your existence a great deal to feed upon. The fault of the record is of course that it's not really private enough; but that is the fault of all confidences. At any rate, I welcome it as a document, a series of data, on the life of a young Englishman of great endowments, character and position at the end of the 19th century. There is nothing I like better than that others should live *for* me, as it were,—in case, of course, I can catch them *at* it. Therefore, in short, continue to live, and *do* continue to let me catch you. I will do anything—everything—munificently—to keep you going to this end. Bear that in mind, and put in all you can. I have read, of course, every word—and I think have had real inspirations in the way of mak-

ing you out. There is absolutely not a word I have lost. Your episode at Hawarden is a prodigy of *reportage*: how grand of you to be able to feel you have such a loaf upon the shelf in case the mothers, and even the sons, ever become too many for you! I would read the newspapers then.

I am much touched by your delightful friendliness about my little old house.<sup>1</sup> Your taste in these things would not, I think, be afflicted by my little undertaking. I don't think it could be so exactly the right thing for me if it were not rather decent. But I won't willingly pander in this manner to any such sympathy (as you may benignantly drop upon me) as will help you in the least not to come down and see it for yourself the very first, or at most the very second or very third, time I try to make you. The merit of it is that it's such a place as I may, when pressed by the pinch of need, retire to with a certain shrunken decency and wither away in—in a fairly cleanly and pleasantly melancholy manner—toward the tomb. It is really good enough to be a kind of little becoming, high-door'd, brass-knocker'd *façade* to one's life. This gives me an advantage, for I feel—after the *Journal*—as if I had got a little behind *your* knocker. Why is the great interest of Mr Gladstone somehow so awfully uninteresting? *Vale*.

Yours always,

HENRY JAMES

<sup>1</sup>Lamb House, Rye.



*The Reform Club,  
Monday p.m.*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

It would be a joy, but I have to feel that it's tormentingly impossible. I shall not be here on Easter Sunday—I am obliged to go down to Rye on the previous Tuesday or Wednesday. Great is my sorrow and envious my sense—in respect to the said Gosse and the said Tatham. I nevertheless magnanimously hurl my benediction at all of you. I've been in town since some time in December, and it draws to an end; a yearning for cableless days and dinnerless nights possessing me. However, I have a perch in this place which makes an occasional return a fairly simple business—and I shall again, within the year (!!) be in hail of you. Not that that has lately profited me much—or does so at the present sorry moment. But I cherish you none the less and am none the less constantly

Yours,

HENRY JAMES



Lamb House, Rye,  
Dec. 18th, 1898

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

My long silence—since a good note I had from you too long ago—has not been *baseness* of any species: it has been high consideration and exquisite delicacy. I know your state, I feel your burden, I groan with your charges (by which I don't mean that you over-charge *me*,) and I ache and sigh, generally, with your sorrows and reliefs. Therefore I spare you with a noble solicitude all importunate rejoinders. The rhythm of one's correspondence should have a strange and subtle measure. Still, I do want to send you an articulate Xmas greeting and to let you know that your prompt note evoked as prompt a gratitude. I have, for nearly 6 months now, not stirred from this haven of rest, and I spend Xmas here; after which I hope to go, rather briefly, abroad. Two-and-twenty years on end of London have qualified me in perfection for a small brown hilltop community islanded in a more or less drained, though much diminished and otherwise curtailed and simplified imitation of the Roman Campagna. Romney Marsh only wants a few aqueducts and ruins and tombs and temples and tourists to *strike*, really, with that resemblance. But I hope your pack is sliding off your back and your interlude beginning. I shall see Gosse a fortnight hence in town and ask

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him for news of you. He gave me some—a while ago—of your Mother, I remember, that didn't sound altogether good: I mean as regards some need of change of residence at a moment—or in conditions—inconvenient to her. But I hope all that is straightened out. I think of her with continued sympathy. Good-night—with every good wish for your endurance of the great Christmas grimace. I call it that out of the abyss of my wail for my vanished infancy.

When? you ask. Never, I fear, at this rate. But I pray for other rates, and am yours very constantly

HENRY JAMES

*Lamb House,  
Rye, January 24th, 1900*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

This is, in return for your so charmingly graceful and fanciful letter, a very sorry show—and I blush to think of the inconvenience that my double grossness (first in exposing the seal of the enclosed to rupture and then in permitting it to be delayed in re-transmission to you) may have put you to. There came down on Saturday a friend to stop till Monday, and on that morning this letter for you was stupidly placed with his—so that he accidentally, without heeding, tore it, and then, in confusion, gave it to my servant to be, with explanations, given to its owner. Smith placed it on my table for *me* to see and attenuate—and I only managed to take in the situation with horror, *to-day*! Please accept my abject apologies for the whole tissue of clumsy accident and delay. And don't *write* me of your acceptance—let me simply burn (as to the ears) and brood over it, by my lonely and penitential fireside. Your admirable note already received and rejoiced in is more than the actual due of yours, my dear Arthur, always,

HENRY JAMES

P.S. I particularly rejoice in all the ameliorations you found at home.

*Lamb House, Rye,  
Tuesday p.m.*

MY DEAR ARTHUR (wasn't that what I used to call you in the so far-away time?). Your letter is a brave showing and gives me great delight—would still do so as a simple sign and sound of you even if it proposed a less generous sacrifice—or no sacrifice at all. It would be indeed a joy to receive you here Thursday or Friday *if* I could muster courage and duplicity to tell you that the journey from Brighton hither and back *within the day*, is at this season feasible with any sort of comfort or cheer. The ugly, disconcerting truth is that I haven't the assurance to speak of it favourably to you unless you can *sleep*. *Can't* you, by any effort of still greater magnanimity? In *that* case, on either of those days—Thursday or Friday—I should be overjoyed to welcome you and be able to think of your peregrination without shame and a sense of scandal: the scandal, I mean, of my cynical selfishness. There is in the business a vast deal of train (on the one day supposition) and of changing and waiting (Hastings, Lewes, etc.,) for a very little stay when you get here—and train, etc., now in damp and darkness and cold. I don't feel that I can lash you up to that. But I can put you up for a real interval not at all intolerably—and I place that alternative very hopefully before you. Do, *do* try! If you really can't spare the time



Lamb House, Rye,  
May 25th, 1900

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

It's more than a week since I received at Queen's Acre your gallant and graceful note and suffered day after day to pass without a sign of acknowledgment to you. It reached me at a moment of confusion and complication and I brought it back with me here in the spirit of deferred hope with which the Ark of the Deluge may have harboured the Dove of the same—I mean as flattering my sense that the waters would go down and that I should quickly be able to signal to you across what remained of them. But they were deep here, too, on my return, and I am only just emerging, in short. I valued your sending winged words after me, that partly *manqué* golden afternoon, as much as I had been sorry (thanks to a most extemporized excrescence of a day at Howard Sturgis's) not to see you in your palace of pedagogy. It struck me as a palace of rich, warm tones and accumulated resources. And no afternoon is really *manqué* that gave me Mrs Cornish and—however briefly—Mr Luxmoore, and the whole episode, picture and general treasure of memory. I passed 10 divine minutes in Mrs C.'s garden *with* Mrs C.—not to mention others, upstairs, in that windowy, viewy, draughty saloon. But everything and everyone, save you and your absence,

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were delightful. I had never got so romantic an impression of Eton. It made me think more things than I can say now—but that I might have babbled had I found you. It enriched my mind. It lashed up my imagination. Not an ounce of it, not a flight of Mrs Cornish's fancy, nor a hair of Mr Luxmoore's head was lost upon me. Only *you* were lost. But your letter wasn't. Well, I think of you there. I wish I could have had the fuller revelation of your house. You *must* give it to me some day. I greet you affectionately and am yours always,

HENRY JAMES



*Lamb House, Rye,  
September 19th, 1900*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

It's very handsome of you to blow me so straight a blast of your pleasant prose. Wonderful for a various and profuse activity seems to me your large young life and your letter gives me the feeling of a "lift" accorded by the charioteer of some spanking four-in-hand to the quiet wayfarer overtaken as he slinks along the grassy margin of the road. I have had the momentary increase of motion and of elevation of view, and now I am down in the footway again and watching the chariot roll off in its golden cloud of dust. I wish I had grander news to give you in exchange for your own. But I haven't *any* of any hurrying to and fro on my own part. There has been about my draughty portal a good deal of that, all summer, on the part of others: waves of family history in particular have rolled over my head. But I haven't stirred hence—scarce for so much as a night—since the month of April last. For a month past, moreover, this place has been, for looks, airs, moods, extraordinarily amiable. Kindly do you speak of my volume of *Tales*, but it's the kind of thing that I know not of (the book is,) after it's a thing *done*. I mean that one is already so away from it and almost irresponsible. There it is, at any rate, for better or



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worse; and these other lucubrations—for I am steadily lucubrating—are preparing to consort with it. I am interested in what you tell me of your Uncle, H. S.<sup>1</sup>—whom somehow, by the way, I thought of in almost every light *but* that of your Uncle. However, I *did* think of your Mother at the time of his death. I knew him but little and hadn't seen him for a number of years; but I had a very pleasant memory of two or three contacts. Yet surely no man was ever less personal—and one wondered how, so pure an organ of thought as he seemed, the impression of character was so attachable to him. Distinction clothed him about. Your brother Fred is personal, and I found him a very interesting, charming, acute and observant modern youth—modern highly, as you say; with only (it's my own criticism) a tendency to place Golf too high in his intellectual interests. However, it will find its level! I'm delighted to know he has work to his hand in town. I much see his affinity with town: but should be glad to see some signs of its again breaking out in respect of Lamb House. I am, in fond fancy, settling you afresh in that pedagogic palace of which I caught in May, but the mere rich flash, or heavy adumbration of. May Eton continue to mellow—as well as to bellow! round you. I've a sense of being in Gosse's bad books—that sense is unmistakeable; and I verily believe I must work it off by a letter to-night. *Do* see Howard S.<sup>2</sup> for me. I say “*for me*”, as if it could possibly be against. Well, bless you both! And do let me, by your Mother's kind leave, some day see

<sup>1</sup>Henry Sidgwick.

<sup>2</sup>Sturgis.

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the insinuating Tremans. I was the other day with the Wolseleys who had the tenderest words for it. Such words have I for you.

Ever yours,

HENRY JAMES

*Lamb House, Rye,  
December 30th, 1900*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

It's almost the last day of the year—almost the last hours; and while this eminently disreputable old rag of time is borne away into the dark backward on the wings of the angry tempest that befits it, I snatch my final chance not too disgracefully to fail to acknowledge to you one of the few redeeming phenomena it has brought forth. That saving decency is represented by the kindest of little letters from you, received too many weeks ago—and too silently received; and now, again, by my having found here on my table, on coming down to Xmas, the magnanimously undiscouraged and forgiving tribute of your last small (too small) sheaf of beautiful verse. I won't attempt to tell you why I hadn't shot you a dim rocket in return for your letter; since, when one hasn't written, one hasn't; and the letter-question is always with us, and I long since let everything go and am naked and unashamed in dereliction, all round, and dishonour. But here is an affectionate and grateful pat on your back as you will get from any man, and as sincere a wish that you weren't in the thick folds of institutions and employments, dominations and powers, so constantly hidden from my sight. Meanwhile it is delightful to me to catch you in the personal glimpses

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that your so interesting poetry permits, and to try and hold you thereby for the moment, clutch and keep and, however imperfectly, domesticate you. You are delightful company to me thus, and I've been giving you the best of this sad imprisoned afternoon. Your things—lyrical in particular—penetrate and move me, and, as I have told you before, make me awfully envy you your fiddle. You draw from me sighs and silences—real responses all. I wish you perhaps, aesthetically, a greater hardness, more bronze to the knuckle—but it doesn't prevent me from loving you: which was to be demonstrated. I go up to town to-morrow for 3 months (105, Pall Mall) so that if you are ever passing—but you never pass! I wish you a big, solid, cloying slice of the new era—may you digest it better than I seem likely to do even my small probable mouthful. I invoke benedictions on you and on everything that is yours and I am, my dear Arthur, your very constant

HENRY JAMES

P.S. Will you, on next sight of your brother Fred, communicate to him my very friendly interest, inquiry, sympathy, hope?

105 *Pall Mall*, S.W.

January 18th, 1903

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

The feeble pleasantry of my message to you through the gentle Churchill<sup>1</sup> was far from the intention of importunity—and yet in the presence of this happy consequence I not only can't regret that it moved you to action, but fairly like to think that I almost meant it should—and this even in the face of my renewed sense of how perpetually (without prodding of mine) you are being moved to action and how extravagant are the revolutions of the great fire-wheel that you decorate by the name of an Eton Mastership.

All thanks, at any rate, for the rich red spark that you have struck off at me, and that suffices by itself to colour my consciousness with—well, I will borrow your own metaphor (talk of mine!) and say with the glow of one of the strawberry-patches that you discover in the remarkably unprofitable market-garden of my published prose. I delight in fire-wheels on my horizon (in default of having them under my roof itself, which would be *the* place;) they give me a remote rosy rim, even though the central spaces be grey and cold. And so, for the moment, as I say, I have brought you slightly nearer. I hadn't heard of you for long, (in many

<sup>1</sup>E. G. Spencer-Churchill.



HENRY JAMES

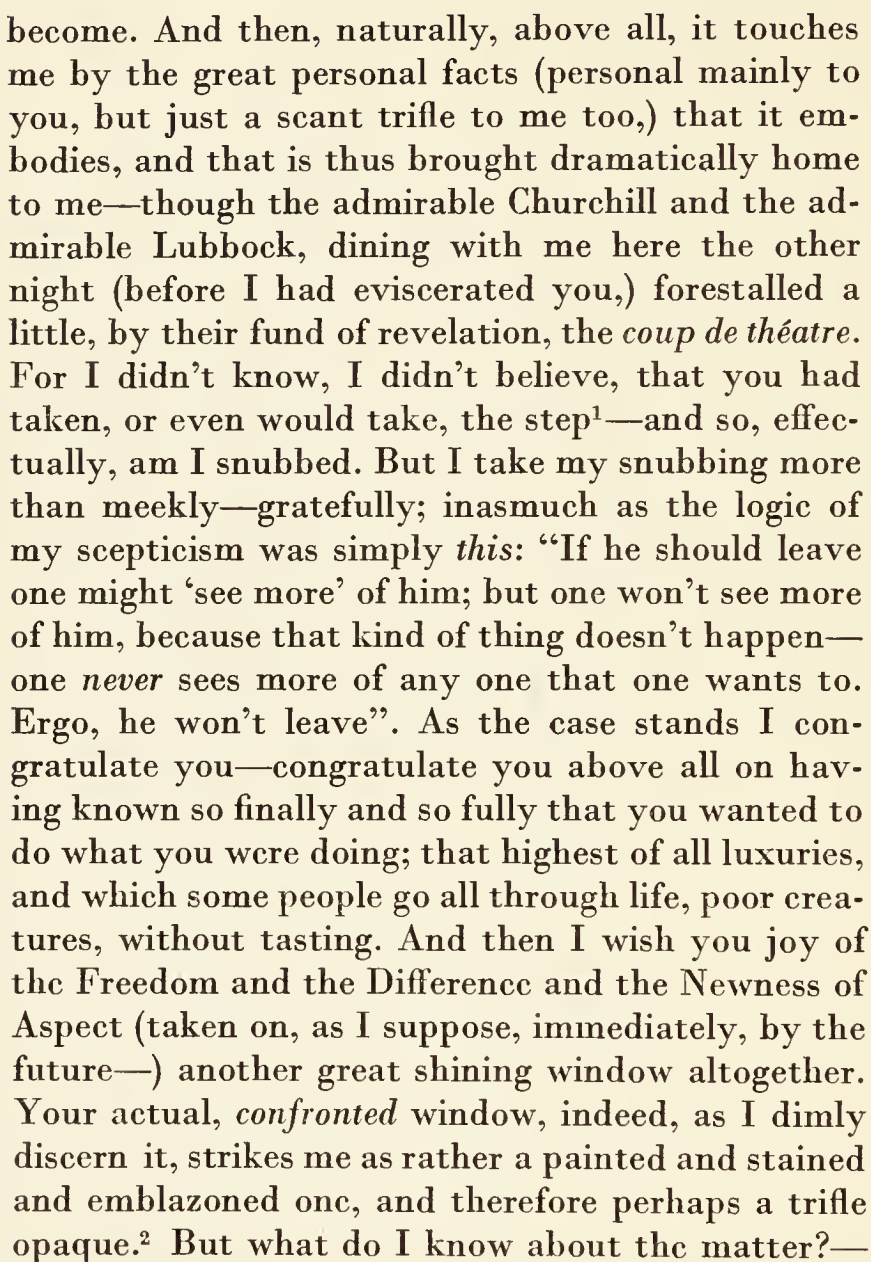
*Lamb House, Rye,*  
*Sussex, January 26th, 1904*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I will tell you at once with all frankness why I acknowledge only after such vile delay your last, but not your least, benevolent literary offering. Your stately green folio came to me, by your kind remembrance, many and many days ago, but I wished not to make you the responsive sign without having read it, and yet wished not to read it save in some congruous corner, on some rightly-cushioned window-bench, of Time. And this—these things—I had, among many quite wrong hours and in many quite desert places, to wait for and even a little to woo. But I lately encountered them and pounced upon them, so that I am now, as to soul and sense, possessed of your beautiful address.<sup>1</sup> Beautiful, very, I think it—truly genial and personal and interesting. Me, with my documentary passion, reducing everything to a figured objectivity, it has interested in more ways perhaps than I can even explain to you or than you verily intended—which cryptic saying, however, mustn't trouble you; for what it comes to, after all, is but to say that you are still *more* charming than you know. It is the most vivid and illustrative *Eton* document I have happened to encounter—which, for that matter, is what it had every right to

<sup>1</sup>*The Myrtle Bough*, by A. C. B. (privately printed).





<sup>1</sup>*i.e.* of giving up his work at Eton.

<sup>2</sup>Alluding to the *Letters of Queen Victoria*, of which A. C. B. was joint-editor.

save that you will, at the worst, let in some fine yellow light. Still, you will break no panes—nor, I take it, need you. *That*, in due course, you must have some other, some different try at. I wish you meanwhile all the comfortably seated and richly lighted interest your actual task has to yield. I see you clothed, rosily, in a sort of glow of poetic justice. I go up to town on Thursday (for a couple of months,) and I spend this coming Sunday at Windsor, as it happens, with Howard S.<sup>1</sup> If there were any presumption of my seeing you then, I should be glad to have greeted you, even with this sad belatedness, beforehand; but in fact I can be glad purely and simply, for the presumption can't help being the other way. Which leaves me ever so disinterestedly and constantly yours,

*Lamb House, Rye,  
Sussex, December 13th, 1908*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I have had a gentle and gratifying letter from Hugh Walpole—and I have had a still more moving and more valued message, as who should say, from your too little-seen self, transmitted me by the acute and faithful Percy Lubbock and bearing on the said H. W. and on his intention or desire of approach. These things have given me—all given me, pleasure in their degree, but what has given me most is that there comes out of them a happy sense of communication with You—which behold me proceed to develop and make the most of, as altogether too precious and too rare to be neglected. I *have*, for that matter, to invoke your benevolent aid—being left with my little response to the ingenuous Walpole on my hands through some stupid inadvertent loss or destruction of his letter. I forget his address—will you therefore very kindly inscribe it on the enclosed and cause the same to be posted? What you tell Percy about him for me interests and affects me—his own letter was charming—and I have breathed on him nothing but charity. Of yourself, my dear Arthur, I have sought news wherever and whenever I could, these many months—and lately on three or four occasions from the said authentic Percy—thanks to strange and indescribable hazards—not to



*Lamb House, Rye,  
Sussex, July 24th, 1909*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I have too long owed you thanks for a benevolent and interesting, yet too dejected letter. But I have really held off through consideration for your peace and ease—so that you shouldn't seem too soon to have drawn down serious consequences. Your letter makes me wish I had after all not missed you that other week, during my funny little visit to Cambridge; not that I didn't wish this at the time, but that I only allowed then for the normal nature of your displacement. I feel now as if I should have liked to lay—or to attempt to lay—a healing hand on you at almost any cost to your immediate convenience. You will say I talk at my ease about healing hands—however, you'll see what I shall do if I *do* get a go at you. It's meanwhile almost ancient history that you saw our admirable and delightful, and on the whole rather cheering G. T. Lapsley during his too few days in England, and also that *I* saw him just afterwards, when he reported of you very handsomely, and when, further, he was exceedingly amusing—not to say extravagantly and outrageously droll and derisive, on the company I had kept during my two or three days among your beautiful shades. However, he didn't in the least destroy my conceit of having by no means wholly failed of light

and joy; impoverished though the shades were—or deepened the shade—by my not having found you. He, G. T. L., has been heard from, I believe, a little dolefully, but in the sense of high salubrity, at St Moritz or wherever; but of this, doubtless, you know more than I.—You mustn't think I shall keep always “thanking” you for Hugh Walpole; but I must do so at least this once again, for he came over to me on Monday last from Littlehampton, where he had been spending his Sunday with literary actresses (the company he keeps, and *finds*, for queer variety and quantity!) and gave me 24 hours. We have become fast friends; I am infinitely touched by his sympathy and charmed by his gifts (not the least marked of his merits being his affection for you); and I wish him no end of ardent existence—feeling as I do that he can handsomely and gallantly carry it. And all this I *like* being and doing, and you helped me to it. So there you are.—*Where* indeed you literally are I don't pretend to divine; you seemed when you last wrote surrounded by an extraordinary choice of luxuriously beautiful habitats. Let this at any rate remind you, in the most, or even in the least beguiling situation you may be a victim to, of the interest and good will of yours very constantly,

HENRY JAMES

*Telegram.*

*Rye, January 31, 1910*

TO ARTHUR BENSON,  
*Magdalene College,  
Cambridge.*

All thanks for beautiful letter. Have been many days ill in bed and though getting better feel future yet too uncertain to engage for 25th, therefore rejoice preferably in charming prospect of independent visit to you little later on. Will write first possible hour.

HENRY JAMES



*Lamb House, Rye,  
Sussex, May 9th, 1910*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I thank you ever so kindly and faithfully—but am really too ill to write. It is alas “acute”, and with a bad physical basis and miserable weak physical side. That is in bed appreciably better—but the misery of my nervous condition is endless; the blackest most poisonous melancholy and trepidation (for 3 or 4 days at a time the latter wretchedness) and deadly weakness and powerlessness to eat reign as a result. I have got out of bed to scribble this misery to you—my perpetual relapses after any improvement punctually send me back there. Forgive this abject wail—though I reach out to your encouragement. But clearly you kept at a higher level, and had not some of the acuter outward worries of your faithful old

HENRY JAMES

*Hill Hall, Theydon Bois,  
Epping, May 30th, 1910*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I *must* make this however poor sign of gratitude for your cheering and consecrating letter. Yes, I feel I *have* taken a better turn, and it has been subjected to some sharp tests. These have shaken, but haven't wholly upset me—and I hold fast to the principle of gradual gain. I have really had a Hell of a Time and the black fiend isn't yet as far behind me as I should like; but the distance slowly increases—which carries me away from him and (to put it most sustainingly) nearer to you and G. T. L.<sup>1</sup> To the latter all love from your and his faithfullest

HENRY JAMES

P.S. I hope, under my sister-in-law's care—inexpressibly blest—presently to be able to join my brother abroad for a few weeks.

<sup>1</sup>*v.* p. 68.

Queen's Acre,  
Windsor, October 15th, 1911

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I can no longer stagger under the burden of my Great Shame—as to which the crisis grows intolerably acute; determined by the humanest of messages from you this a.m. delivered to me by Percy Lubbock, humanest of messengers. I thus hear you speak of me—nay, *to* me—with a noble magnanimity; and it wouldn't take much more to make me grovel at your feet. Think of me indeed, dear Arthur, as *quite* so doing—for what shorter prostration may really figure my penitent sense of long and graceless inexpressiveness since your generous, your tender address to me at a dark hour a year, more than a year, ago. Your beautiful little letter of course came safely and has not been followed, in my spirit, with an hour's oblivion of it. But it *was* followed, or the situation in which it came to me was, by a long very blighted period (that had indeed already been going on for evil months,) during which I found it difficult, even to impossibility, to report of myself—taking refuge meanwhile in the fond hope that little by little, should I but wait, the difficulty, of which I was thoroughly sick, would pass away and leave me freshly articulate. I was obliged to linger on for a whole year in America, where almost all the conditions (quite all, in fact,



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case here much enriched by Percy's brisker presence—to say nothing of ——'s briskest absence (in America). I return to London to-night, but am delighted to find that, with that issue assured, I am quite decently in tune. I have been plying Percy with searching, with the most fondly ingenious, questions about you, and he has brilliantly passed the exam. I rejoice, I think, in everything he tells me without exception—and yet am still further insatiable. But you must appease that yourself. Edmund Gosse spent last Sunday with me (at Rye), and him too I appealed to for news of you, causing him quite freely and handsomely to flow. He was in very genial and graceful form. I saw and greatly admired (2 years and  $\frac{1}{2}$  ago—it seems antediluvian) your fine old collegiate frame—but you were away and I but wistfully passed. What a splendid seat of production you have made of it! But we shall converse better than this, and I am yours, my dear Arthur, all gratefully and faithfully,

HENRY JAMES

Lamb House, Rye,  
Sussex, October 24th, 1911

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

It's monstrous, it's indecent, that I should be thanking you for the beauty and fulness of your magnificent letter in response to mine from Windsor only after this large lapse of days. I feel its magnificence more rather than less, of course, as the days multiply—and must give you *that* happy assurance even if I have still to wait a little longer to give you more. I confidently count upon our meeting in the near future—but I am still involved a little in my long, tight tangle; to the extent, I mean, of being conscious, after two years totally off, of the heavy pressure of arrears—not arrears pecuniary, I am happy to say, but social, sentimental, material too in many ways, above all *personal*, and personally payable. My foreground is formidably encumbered—but I think I am clearing it. I am supposed to be, I desire to be, in London for the winter, but I take refuge here on occasion, and that helps a little, for my most *felt* arrears of all are the “professional”, so to speak—those have *piled* themselves up, and I am only now—quite viciously (which is quite to the *last* degree virtuously,) attacking them. All this is to say that I stay my hand from any further *definiteness* of practical understanding with you than just *this* observation: that if you are to be coming up

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any day during the next month for necessities consonant with your *lunching at the Athenaeum* and can signify the same to me a little in advance I shall yearn to put my legs under the same mahogany; besides which that big topmost room really lends itself to soft digestional talk. Bear this in mind, and if what may then easily and delightfully come of it *does* you will find that the present meagreness, a mere mechanical stop-gap, has done no justice to the flow of soul reserved for you. I do want to see your Magdalene and you in it and of it—but note that I am patient and preliminary. Only very kindly give me a choice of a couple of Athenaeum days if you can.

Yours in fond confidence,

HENRY JAMES



105 *Pall Mall*, S.W.

October 31st, 1911

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

As Wednesday, November 8th, is nearer than the rather dim and distant hinterland of December 9th, why not let me go to *hear* you lecture on the great art of fiction on that p.m.—if you will kindly tell me place and hour—and then join you at dinner at the Athenaeum afterwards, timing that mild feast so as fully to suit your train back to Cambridge? I should like greatly to sit among your hearers (that *greatly* is “governed by” *like*—doesn’t govern *sit*) but would conform strictly to your preference—I mean absent myself, sorrowing, if you absolutely so decree; but what, at the worst, is the matter with the later (convenient) hour at the Club? I found your letter but last night after 3 letterless days (which I love so,) in Surrey. I saw E. G. last night and am “none the less” a whit!

Yours always,

HENRY JAMES

*Reform Club, Pall Mall, S.W.*

*November 1st, 1911*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I won't come then to sit at your feet on the afternoon of the 8th<sup>1</sup>—if there is a danger that I might cause those feet to shuffle the least ungracefully—by which I mean merely uneasily, or with more than the essential fine restlessness of extremities clad in winged sandals. But I *will* come to the Athenaeum on that p.m.—Wednesday 8th; when, I hasten to mention, I shall have nothing *in the least* sinister to “explain” to you into my allusion to having seen E. G. The form of that allusion had but the awkwardness of a poor pleasantry—was a reference to your own mention of his having been (on some late occasion) somehow—well, reprehensive. My small joke meant merely that I had spent an evening with him without the smallest restrictive allusion to you on his part which might, however remotely, pretend to qualify the deep benevolence, *à votre égard*, of yours, my dear Arthur, always

HENRY JAMES

P.S. It may interest you to notice—by which I mean read, if you haven't—a somewhat rowdy and cheeky, but very vivid and able Article by H. G. Wells on “The Contemporary Novel”, in this month's *Fortnightly*. His cheek, for me, is part of his value!

<sup>1</sup>See preceding letter.

*The Athenaeum, Pall Mall, S.W.*

*November 12th, 1911*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

“Uncomfortably intimate” says you? Very far indeed from it, rather—on all that ground on which I think we shall have, occasion favouring, still so much more to speak of. (I hold moreover that where there *is*, or may be, intimacy, there isn’t, or needn’t be, the uncomfortable; and that where there is the uncomfortable there isn’t, or can’t be, intimacy!) At any rate I rejoice immensely in your so handsome and radiant little letter—just this Sunday a.m. (10.45) given to me here and of which the generous spirit mingles with the great benign void, so supplied yet so still, that stretches about me in this place at this hour and which gives me the sense for the time of having one of the kingdoms of the world to myself. Thus with all—or so much—pressure arrested one can more largely *taste* things, as I do your so good and rich assurances—a pledge, let us indeed frankly consider, of our carrying on further, and to happy ends, that associated contemplation into which we dipped so refreshingly the other night. We shall dip deeper, and variously—and it shall always be delightful. I *have* enormously emerged from under the far-trailing pall of my black illness—and never yet had felt myself so much out

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in the light as for that couple of hours. May to-day have been all social fine weather for you!—and your (our) westering sun keep riding altogether high and shining for brave days.

Yours, my dear Arthur, all affectionately,

HENRY JAMES

105 *Pall Mall*, S.W.

May 9th, 1912

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

It's beautiful of you to have breathed upon me so balmily as to that rather abortive occasion (so far as I was concerned,) of Tuesday. My intensely literary and quasi-technical subject (the only approach possible to the big bristling Browning *total*, which would have been wholly unmanageable,) was inordinately thankless, and my large, promiscuous and so predominantly female and frumpy audience, disconcertingly unreachable. (I had taken for granted a company of men of letters—on my own comparatively private premises.) So I lost heart and voice and almost consciousness—lost everything (almost too) but your esteem and confidence, and that of a few other children of light—with Percy L.<sup>1</sup> as the most torch-waving. In this I rejoice—to the effect of being therefore on my side but the more and more affectionately yours,

HENRY JAMES

<sup>1</sup>Lubbock.

21 *Carlyle Mansions,*  
*Cheyne Walk, S.W.*

*May 13th, 1913*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

You see I have so far deferred to your injunctions not to reply to your beautiful letter as to have behaved *almost* as if I were remaining dumb: this just enough to show you that I appreciate *all* your forms of consideration. But if it's so charming to me to be in communication with you again, we don't communicate unless I hold up my end a little too. You obeyed the kindest movement in letting me again have your voice—so far as that fine sound is represented by the rush of your pen. No, we are not mutually audible much otherwise—for if you ever come to the Athenaeum it is not at my hours, so far as I ever have any there now; which is little, more's the pity. (The pity in general, I mean, of signifying that I no longer freely circulate—but that's another story.) Please believe that your admirable words touch me all the more and that the sense of your great goodwill has received, within me, much quickening. I delighted to meet you the other day in that bright band of conspirators—against my youth. But I like to see how yours prevails and shines and overflows! May your high tide long wait for its turn. How I should hang on your report of dear Howard resurgent. However, I dream

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of being able to get to him—when he at least will tell me of yourself. You brush away direct inquiry with a fine florid image. But your fidelity most concerns me, and that, I feel all re-engaged, my dear Arthur, to yours all constantly,

HENRY JAMES



21 Carlyle Mansions,  
Cheyne Walk, S.W.

April 24th, 1914

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

This is only a word to attest—in *deep deprecation of any response*—my sense of the agreeable relation with you (to put it mildly) constituted by these graceful exchanges—and not frustrated even by the richer and richer obscuration of dear A——’s history—or mystery. You weave round this last such layers—upon layers—of the impenetrable that I quite recognise how long it will take you to remove them successively. Don’t dream of doing so now—opportunity will come in due course. The gentle youth meanwhile is having a rare educational chance and a most interesting adventure, I feel sure, in his far Tunisian motor-tour; which I think wouldn’t have come to him if he hadn’t been “écrasé”. . . . You don’t confine your cryptic passes to A——’s case either, but lift the corner of your own tent only to flap it down at me again—till I would really fain crawl under to see what, as you say, does “go on inside” (putting snail-shell for canvas). Thus do you lead me a shadow-dance; but it’s all right, and *I like* the sense of revelations in reserve—if you’ll only remember now what a wealth of them you eventually owe.

Yours all faithfully and yearningly,

H. J.

21 *Carlyle Mansions,*  
*Cheyne Walk, S.W.*

*April 27th, 1914*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I answer you bourgeois fashion, as you say—just in order that you shall *not*, in A——’s fashion, answer *me*, whereby I shall have the pleasure of feeling myself in correspondence with the aristocracy. *Do*, by your silence, let me! And let me too tell you that I of course understand that you were a little (and most happily) playing with the A—— lights and shades as they passed, and were amused that you had done so and invited me to be amused, which I was and am—to a perfect comprehension of the extreme lightness of the improvised soufflé. Yet if there is a cold morsel of that trifle left about, do let us in due time—or occasion serving—eat it together. What I really had it most at heart to say on the chance of an imperfect sense of it on your part, was that A——’s silence does probably come from the fact of his having been the last 3 weeks motoring in “Southern Tunisia”, wondrous thought, with Mrs Wharton; during which time I daresay his letters mayn’t very accurately (or punctually) have pursued him—or the motor-habit been very favourable to the reply-habit.—Yes, I do know and greatly admire Carlyle’s Sterling, a wonderful gem of the bricks-without-straw (or comparatively without) family. Goodnight—and do, again, be the aristocrat to your most bourgeois old

HENRY JAMES

21 *Carlyle Mansions,*  
*Cheyne Walk, S.W.*  
*April 15th, 1915*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I respond very heartily to your kind appreciation of our recent little scrap of a meeting; I deplore the vain errand by which you appeared still to have been left somewhat bemocked and breathless; and I return with earnest care the copies and the original letters you are so good as to have submitted to my consideration. I have myself heard this a.m., as happens, from G. T. L., who has clearly been rendering the most generous service to his suffering friend at Boulogne. He was to have been returning now, but has decided to wait over several days more in the exercise of that charity—in which he has quite poured himself out. How admirably, in all these convulsions and cataclysms, do most of one's friends come out! If you ask me if that remark is also à propos of the copied letter enclosed by you, I say—well, what on earth *do* I say? Chiefly, I think, that by the exhibition of that evidence you invite me to bend over an abyss. I have had occasion to bend before over the same—and yet even after so much practice have continued to fail to descry the bottom. There it is, I sometimes say—but no, there is a deeper depth yet. Strange and terrible is life—

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unspeakable and inexpugnable is character (or, so to speak, disposition); very considerable, in fine, what there would be to be said. But I doubt if I shall ever say it—even on that day when we shall by all means meet at the Athenaeum. It would take me, and above all *you* would take me, too far. But decidedly let us meet, all the same. The way would be, I think, for you to let me know in advance *about* when you will again be coming up to town and then whether my finding you there either for luncheon or for tea (or even for dinner—if you should be taking a late train back to Cambridge) would meet your views. It would be, I may mention, rather a help to me if there should be a pair of alternative days. But to manage it somehow—or anyhow—will be the great thing and a joy to yours all-faithfully,

HENRY JAMES

21 *Carlyle Mansions,*  
*Cheyne Walk, S.W.*  
*Tuesday, April 20th, 1915*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

Just a speeded word to say that to-morrow Wednesday at 1.40 (if you can allow me till then,) will do beautifully for our meeting at the Athenaeum; and I shall accordingly turn up there to the time of that punctuality. I shall restrain all further overflow till then. There would seem to be between us much matter indeed for the moralist and the philosopher—but the more the better for yours (at least) all faithfully,

HENRY JAMES

21 *Carlyle Mansions,*  
*Cheyne Walk, S.W.*

*May 15th, 1915*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I have been plunged in an inevitability of silence, and I don't know that I even now should be able to break through the oppression of the unutterable if I hadn't been reading your so happy (happy!) volume on your brother Hugh. Otherwise your good letter of days ago has been daily engaging my eye but to the effect of reminding me how our public conditions, with their private range, strike at the very roots of my production of postal matter, a scant energy, ever, within me, at the best. I think I have nevertheless wanted a good deal to take you up (a little) on your saying that you have "meditated *much*" on the affair that mainly occupied our talk that day at the Athenaeum—so definitely does that statement signify to me excess. The "much", the quantity, is out of proportion; the subject will have invited, I feel, but the rapid sinking of a single shaft of reflection, through such depth of soil—no great—as is there to take it; by which, I mean, the profit of the case could be hauled up almost in no time. My own little shaft was long ago abandoned—I mean as far as meditation goes: the mine is quite exhausted. . . . Yes, I have found your "Hugh" a charming and vivid thing, of the easiest hand and

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truest tone and free-est grace (I hate writing the superlative of free!) and above all an admirable English social document—more of this latter than you can probably be made (pardon the violence of the term!) to understand. It tells so much about so many things—as I see with my mixture of attachment and detachment both so inevitable. What a case your brother—susceptible, I feel, of a little *sharper* outline and identification: yet your book a cluster of aspects and record of impressions your feeling about and testimony to which have been infinitely and most agreeably appreciable to yours all faithfully,

HENRY JAMES





*PART II*  
THE MONOD LETTERS



## EDITOR'S NOTE

THE following letters from Henry James to M. Auguste Monod are exclusively concerned with projects for the translation of various stories of his into French. He warmly welcomed the *idea* of such translations, of which M. Monod must have sent him several; but the most interesting point in these letters is to observe how Henry James in his passionate devotion to "form" and precision of meaning in his work realized with an increasing agony of mind how that which he had so delicately wrought in English must, however skilful and sympathetic the translation, be racked and mutilated in the process. "Translation (he says) is an effort—though a most flattering one—to *tear* the hapless flesh, and in fact to get rid of so much of it that the living thing bleeds and faints away."

I have not been able to trace with any definitive accuracy how many of these projects were actually carried through.

E. F. BENSON



Lamb House, Rye,  
November 1st, 1905

DEAR MR MONOD,

I feel the *hommage* of your inquiry and your kind expressions, but am afraid your proposal to offer *Madame de Mauves* and *The Siege of London* to French readers happens to encounter on my part a good deal of mistrust and detachment (in respect of the two productions themselves). *Madame de Mauves*, you too kindly judge, is a very early and meagre performance, written long ago, one of the first small fictions of my too long list. Frankly, I should not care to see it at this very late date (after more than thirty, thirty-three years) affront the intense electric light of a Parisian Revue. It has no great sense. As for the other, it is also very ancient, more than twenty-five years old, and at a period during which I have been working much more importantly and I think expertly than in those primitive cases. I do not care to patronize the revival of such antecedent matters. In an *Edition définitive* that I am preparing of my novels and tales, I am omitting both the things you name. But if you should really care to translate something of mine, I should send you three or four of my later and more recent fictions to choose from, and would ask nothing for the job . . . in the way of conditions. Let me add that I had never been eager to be translated,

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holding that one's form and style are a part of one's value; that essence and thereby that value is terribly liable to evaporate in the process. And I have had a very few disconcerting adventures in French with all my poor *real* little notes replaced by the most shameless *clichés* and failures to render.

Believe me,

Yours very truly,

HENRY JAMES



*Lamb House, Rye,*  
*November 4th, 1905*

DEAR MR MONOD,

Je vous remercie d'*Ameera* dont j'ai goûté la forme française que vous lui avez donnée ainsi que de votre bienveillance pour Madame de Mauves que je persiste (père dénaturé) à vouloir deshériter en faveur de ses sœurs cadettes. Je vous expédie, à cet effet, deux volumes de nouvelles assez récentes où vous trouverez désignés au crayon (à la table) 6 ou 7 petits récits parmi lesquels vous pourriez peut-être choisir, et dont deux ou trois surtout paraissent devoir se prêter à une traduction *soignée*. Je vous recommande les trois premiers de chaque recueil et *The Tree of Knowledge* (dans *The Soft Side*). Mais lisez d'abord *The Two Faces* (dans *The Better Sort*) ou bien *Paste* dans l'autre volume, petit conte à la Maupassant, pris à rebours. Tout cela est très court et serait très maniable pour quelqu'un qui aurait la main que vous devez avoir. Essayez-vous aux *Two Faces*, si le cœur vous en dit. Je ne vous ferais pas de conditions. Je vous abandonnerais les droits en échange d'une jolie traduction. Voilà.

Believe me,

Yours truly,

HENRY JAMES

*Lamb House, Rye,  
December 17th, 1905*

DEAR MR MONOD,

Pardon my accidental delay in thanking you for your letter of a few days ago. I imagined in general that I wasn't particularly easy to translate, for the possession in any degree of a form and colour of one's own opposes an obstacle always to any but a very appropriate rendering into another tongue and the other tongue may even forbid its being appropriate enough! But evidently I am in the strange predicament of defying the genius of the French language *altogether*, I who adore that genius, who have always found myself irresistibly sacrificing to it, and who pass in this benighted country for an unbridled Gallicist. The impossibility of my longer fictions I quite recognise—but I had fancied that some of my shortest might be manipulated and that the fact of their being so essentially by my intention, at least, studies in *composition*, (which so few English things are) in condensation and in foreshortening, might already recommend them. But I have evidently underestimated their unmanageability (irreductibility) of surface, of which your yet so comparatively mild a specimen (of the unparaphrasable) from *Paste* is a prompt example. Et moi qui m'imaginai que *Paste* se laissait lire à peu près comme une traduction libre (ou plutôt moins libre que l'ori-

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ginal) de Maupassant . . . au point qu'il serait facile même de le remettre en français. Il est vrai que je ne l'avais pas moi-même soumis à cette épreuve. N'y perdez pas votre temps, cela n'en vaut pas la peine: ou ne persistez que si cela vous paraît mieux aller. Des nouvelles que j'ai marquées c'est je crois la moins considérable. But there are no holes to pick in the short specimen passage in your letter: that is all right and I am

Yours truly,

HENRY JAMES

58, rue de Varenne,

26 avril, 1907

CHER MONSIEUR MONOD,

Je viens d'écrire à M. Dumoulin et lui donner l'autorisation directe pour *Perle Fausse* que vous me demandez. Puisse cette parole le mettre en mouvement! Mais je ne puis m'empêcher de réaffirmer ce que j'ai déjà dû vous laisser plus ou moins deviner, c'est à dire que j'ai la pleine conscience de me prêter mal, pour ce que j'ai fait de mieux, à la traduction et que cela ne me procure, ne m'a procuré par le passé qu'une maigre jouissance. Au milieu des clichés, et des atténuations et des faux fuyants, de tout cela il ne me paraissait rester trace de mon expression personnelle. Voilà mon sentiment pour *presque* toute traduction française: cela demande trop de concessions et de compromis. Donc, donc . . . j'ai mieux aimé, en général, m'y soustraire et j'ai été en effet peu traduit. Mais que cela ne vous décourage pas, surtout pour le *Siège de Londres*. Je me souviens de cette nouvelle, malheureusement comme d'une chose assez mal venue (par des circonstances particulières au moment où je l'ai écrite).

Believe me,

Yours very truly,

HENRY JAMES

58, rue de Varenne,

26 avril, 1907

CHER MONSIEUR MONOD,

Un mot de post scriptum à ma lettre trop pressée de tantôt. Je veux bien que vous traduisiez *The Liar* si le cœur vous en dit, ou mieux encore *The Author of Beltraffio*; mais je vous supplie de ne pas songer à *Covering End* qui n'est pas une nouvelle *at all*, mais une pièce, une comédie en un acte, faite à la demande d'Ellen Terry, qu'elle n'a jamais trouvé l'occasion de jouer et que j'ai alors reprise pour lui donner telle quelle une forme narrative en faisant accompagner le dialogue tout simplement par les indications qui équivaudraient au jeu des acteurs. Cette invasion de la vieille *country house* anglaise par la curieuse, l'aventureuse Américaine, n'aurait aucun sens pour le lecteur français, pas plus, il me semble que la situation exposée dans le *Siège de Londres*: ces questions d'Anglais et d'Américain entre eux touchent si peu le public d'ici. Je m'étonne fort de ce que dans les *Deux Magiques*<sup>1</sup> vous ne préféreriez pas la nouvelle tout autrement curieuse et faite de *The Turn of the Screw*.

Tout à vous,

HENRY JAMES

<sup>1</sup>The two *Magics* (les deux *Magies*), un des cas très rares où Henry James se trompe de mot en Français. [*Monod.*]

58, rue de Varenne.

Je vous ferai envoyer par Heinemann les deux volumes de *Terminations* et de *Embarrasments* où vous trouverez *The Death of the Lion*, *The Altar of the Dead*, et mieux encore *The Figure in the Carpet*. *The Lion* et *The Figure* vous seraient je crois assez praticables, surtout ce dernier. (*The Altar* moins.)

Pardonnez à ce griffonnage essoufflé: le temps me manque pour vous dire autre chose que ceci: Attendez pour lire tout roman de moi la publication de la bonne et belle édition définitive et collective de toutes mes fictions qui va bientôt paraître, très revue et très triée. Ne me lisez que là dedans.

Bien à vous,

HENRY JAMES

Lamb House, Rye,  
Sussex, July 17th, 1907

DEAR MONSIEUR MONOD,

Je réponds de mon mieux à la question que vous me faites au sujet de la phrase de *la Conquête* (fort bien, mettez Conquête!) *de Londres* et pour cela j'ai recours au volume, car du diable si je m'en souviens! Je ne vois pas bien (après enquête) votre objection à la partie de la phrase (*antiquated play, etc.*) que vous me citez, puisque tout dans une œuvre étrangère a sa valeur de *ton étranger* et puisqu'aussi cela *date* et que l'aventurière il y a 20 ans et plus tenait sa place plus que maintenant. Ce n'est pas sans raison que je prêtais à *Littlemore* cette nuance d'ennui à l'égard de la pièce, et que je faisais ressortir qu'il l'éprouvait même à l'excès. Mais supprimez-le si vous croyez que cela (le ton de l'allusion) peut suggérer au lecteur français un auteur trop peu averti! Voilà ce que je ne voudrais pas paraître!

Pour ce qui est de l'autre remarque celle de Mrs. Dolphin p. 91 ("*It's like the decadence of the Roman Empire*"), elle a pour but d'aider à caractériser la personne qui parle, d'être *in character* la sorte de chose qu'elle est assez niaisement sujette à dire et que neuf Américaines sur dix, jugeant la société européenne toujours à l'aide de leurs *cheap* souvenirs littéraires, trouveraient d'un bon effet. C'est enfin, non pas une parole d'auteur, mais de





*Lamb House, Rye,*  
*August 2nd, 1907*

Just a hurried word to thank you for your last letter and to say that if I accidentally omitted to say a word to you in last writing about *The Other House*, *c'est qu'il a peu de chose à en dire*. Should you like to see it? in that case I will send you my sole copy, only asking that you kindly return it, as it's the two volume form of the original edition—now, (already) I think, absolutely rare. The only thing, I imagine, to say about the book is this: that it is simply a three act play converted into a narrative in three "Books". It was first written as a play, which fortune didn't seem to promise to favour, and then laid by (after only one manager had read it). Then at the end of 2 or 3 years the material was economically used *tel quel*, as it stood, for the narrative purpose: the one small scrap of re-arrangement (I mean departure from the scenic form) being the 3 or 4 opening pages. The rest is all "scenic" and the thing thus perhaps a considerable curiosity: which may be its only merit!

Yours very truly,

HENRY JAMES

*Dictated.*

*Lamb House, Rye,  
November 16th, 1912*

DEAR AUGUSTE MONOD,

I have your much informing letter and thank you kindly for it, even though it plunges me afresh into the bottomless pool (as I always find that oppressive element) *de propos et de questions traductionnels*. I was in hopes—I had been for some time—that that mocking ghost had been perhaps finally and permanently laid: with such abject fear does his popping-up always inspire me and to such shameless *détours* am I moved to dodge and escape him. My distress at finding myself by no act of my own, in relation with him, hasn't diminished since we last exchanged letters; and I am almost (for the sake of getting out of his range) prompted to assure him that he owes me no account of anything, that I take his word that all is as well as anything so ill (so ill as my being translated, I mean) can possibly be; and that all I now ask of him is never to revive my *épouvante*. The perversity of my feeling on this head is perhaps intensified at the present moment, I grant you, by the fact of my having been for a long time, that is the last seven weeks, most painfully and tiresomely ill (with an atrocious attack of Shingles, if you know what *they* are, *herpes zonalis* medically speaking); and that in this condition,

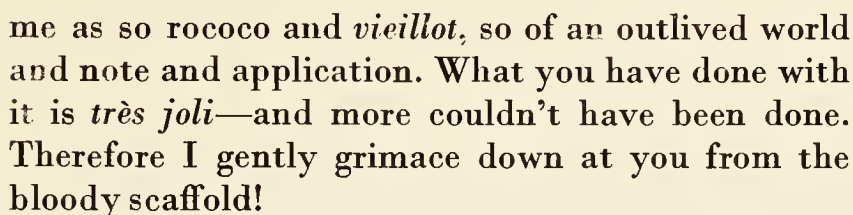


*Dictated.*

*Lamb House, Rye,  
November 28th, 1912*

DEAR AUGUSTE MONOD,

It will be to-day or to-morrow at the very latest that my photograph shall go to you. I am sorry to say I am still very unwell and disabled and utterly laid up, or I should discharge these courtesies (in fact those of the other kind too, in regard to you) more punctually and gracefully. I am glad you could take so easily my *bourru* reply to you of the other day, and am in no state now to tell you why it is that the sense of the translator's fumble (fumble even at the very best and finest, mind you) has always been for me a thing of irritation and anguish. In fact I should probably with all the time in the world scarce be able *de vous rendre compte* of this rude anomaly of my nature. It's a mystery perhaps below even my own sounding! However, the state of exasperation I thus glance at has its fluctuations, its *shades* of intensity; and I can frankly assure you that the receipt of the *Mercure de France* the other day, and the attentive, the almost fascinated perusal therein of your patient pages, fairly turned the grey gloom I speak of into a rosy flush. Don't scruple therefore to send me the second number. It's the beastly thing itself that, breaking out after thirty years in that medium of modernity, strikes



I grieve to say I am still reduced to this cold machinery. The course of my ailment (odious, almost intolerable, in itself) is made a further burden by its damned duration. You mentioned in your first letter having also done *A Given Case* and being at work on *The Marriage. Bourru* as I am, I should be glad to see your rendering of the former of these two, if it has been published, and the latter, *The Marriage*, whenever that fortune crowns it. If you are at all in a *lingering* mood over this last I think I should be able to send you, for your greater aid, and my greater glory, the "revised" volume, from the Definitive Edition, that contains it.

*Je vous salue bien.*

Yours most truly,

HENRY JAMES



Lamb House, Rye,  
December 4th, 1912

DEAR AUGUSTE MONOD,

I am greatly touched by the *gentillesse* of your good letter a day or two ago received, and, since you admit with justice that I am a *bourru*, desire to justify still further my slightly redeeming claim to *bienfaisance*. I hate to figure to myself as the mere author of a harsh interdict—especially with the sense of how much worse *La Conquête de Londres* might have been! and to give form to this act of grace, hereby withdraw any prohibition under which either *Broken Wings* or *The Author of Beltraffio* may have seemed to you to languish; and fully authorise you to do for them, in French, whatever your ingenuity may prompt. I have written to the Macmillans for the “revised” volumes containing *The Marriage* and *Broken Wings* and will send you a copy of *Beltraffio* in like form when, or if, you eventually come round to that. Looking over *The Marriage* in the light of a French rendering, I seem to see it pass well (that is both closely and elegantly enough); but *Broken Wings* will be more difficult—it is so tremendously *nuancé*; yet by no means impossible to a truly ingenious hand; a hand capable of truth with *recherche* and of harmony without violence. *There* is a charming literary problem—all within the limits of the feasible. I respect the limits



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of the feasible—*tout en adorant son étendu*. You see how, at this rate, I should, with interdictions, miss our chance to “*causer ainsi littérairement*” just as much as you. I thank you for the prospect of the second part of the *Conquête*, and shall allow for the *bousculade* over the proofs.

Yours all faithfully,

HENRY JAMES

Garland's Hotel, Suffolk Street,  
Pall Mall, S.W.

December 13th, 1912

DEAR MONSIEUR MONOD,

I have this morning your little note about the difficulty of *Broken Wings*, which I quite understand—though for myself the difficulty, when most *agaçant* even, is exactly what makes the interest or the inspiration. However, I perfectly understood that it would be a devil of a job; and this is only a word, written under the same difficulties (I have come up to London to see a high medical authority) to tell you that a packet consisting of the two Revised volumes containing respectively *The Marriage* and the said *Broken Wings* must have gone to you from Rye about a week ago. Probably it has by this time reached you.—Let me have a word, please, if they continue *not* to arrive. *Ce serait dommage*, because on reading over *The Marriage*, with its revisional touches, before sending it, I said to myself that *that*, at least, would lend itself to some quite possible refinement of your ingenuity. I repeat that I quite see how the other thing does bristle with very *pointus* little problems. There is nothing I can throw myself less into just now than the idea of a “merry” Christmas; but, at least, I desire you the *Bonne Année* as much as I try to hope it for myself; and am,

Yours faithfully,

HENRY JAMES

*Dictated.*

21 *Carlyle Mansions,*

*Cheyne Walk, London, S.W.*

*February 2nd, 1913*

DEAR AUGUSTE MONOD,

I am indeed very behindhand with you, and can only plead, in extenuation, my general condition of interminable, obstinate unwellness, which greatly limits my activity in every direction and is especially blighting in respect to my correspondence. Your manuscript of *Le Cas Spécial* quite safely arrived, but I have been till now too much submerged to take it, even as a "special case", much in hand. The real truth is, dear patient Translator, that my attitude has to be a complete, even if hideously pusillanimous, disavowal of responsibility. I shirk the whole connection. I wriggle away from all the issues with which it bristles. Your rendering, which I have done my best to look over, in spite of this perverse detachment, strikes me as just and happy—though I suffer always (and this isn't in the least special to any rendering of yours) by the fact that the French equivalent, for a given phrase or turn, is, and can only be, at the best but a *false* equivalent; just as the English equivalent would have to consent to being, though in a less degree, I maintain, English having fewer constitutional prejudices, in the case of a rendering of French. But this is always the *lit*

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*de Procuste* of the *malheureux* translated. It is only my limited agility that has kept me from going to Macmillan, any one of these last days, in order to identify there the Volume of my Revised Edition which contains the tale in question, and have it despatched to you as a renewal of my desire to assist you in the minor fashion if I can't in the major. I haven't the series here at hand, as I have in the country, and don't in the least remember with which other things among the "Short Stories" *The Given Case* is associated. Accept it, in whatever company, just for the sake of its small finality of text. I don't at all see why *Le Cas Spécial* shouldn't do, for the reason mainly that I don't see how *Le Cas Donné* possibly could. *Le Cas James* covers all! I trust you, I reassure you, in short I renewedly forgive you and am all faithfully yrs.

HENRY JAMES

September 7th, 1913

DEAR AUGUSTE MONOD,

I have too long owed you an acknowledgment to your most kind letter of a date so distant that I am ashamed to remind you of it. But I live in arrears—they are a necessity and a penalty of my condition and there are good friends who have more to forgive me even than you.

I take it as a great benevolence that you let me know of your appreciation of my jumble of childish memories, which I rejoice that you found interesting. The book was a fond experiment, determined by personal considerations it would take me some time to explain; but I found the experiment succeed, from my own point of view, as soon as all sorts of dimnesses of far past began to *like* to wake up again at pressure of the spring. They kept waking and waking and I grew more and more touched and amazed by their doing so, and thus my rather fatuous emotions became *un gros volume*. And monstrous to say, I am doing another, complementary to it and relating to the next ten years—it was in fact for the sake of this latter part of the case more particularly that I began to maunder at all. You understand the value I attach to your attention to what I do—yet I confess that it is a relief to me this time to have so utterly defied translation. The new volume will complete that defiance and express for me

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how much I feel that in a literary work of the least complexity the very form and texture are the substance itself and that the flesh is indetachable from the bones! Translation is an effort—though a most flattering one!—to *tear* the hapless flesh, and in fact to get rid of so much of it that the living thing bleeds and faints away! forgive the violence of my figure. I believe truly that I feel myself to have lost less blood at your hands than (in those past little adventures) I could have done at any other's. But without having in the least sought the effect, it does interest me, it does even partly exhilarate me to recognise that the small Boy, while yet so tame and intrinsically safe a little animal, is locked fast in the golden cage of the *intraduisible*! It's all the more genial of you to look at him so patiently through that gilt wire of the bars. You will say I make much of the gilding, so good night before I appear to make more! I thank you again and wish you peace and ease and am most truly yours,

HENRY JAMES









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James, Henry

Henry James: letters to A.C.

~~Benson and Auguste Menod~~

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